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AUDACIOUS AUDUBON

American Biography

EDITED BY PHILLIPS RUSSELL

JOHN SMITH—
ALSO POCAHONTAS
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THIS MAN ADAMS
by Samuel McCoy

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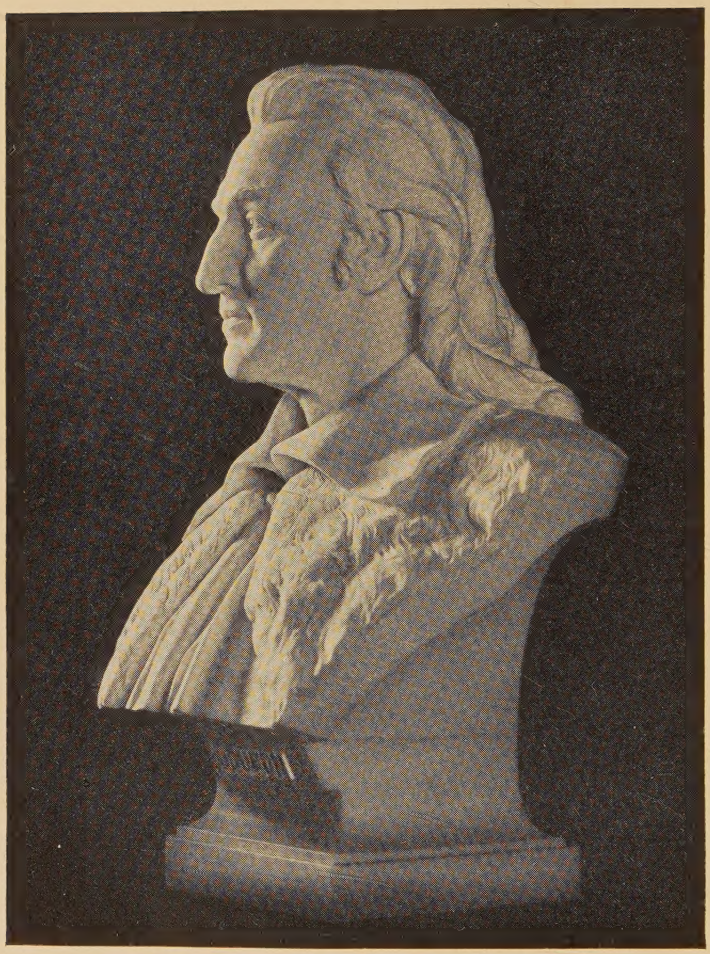

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

From William G. Couper's bust of the artist-naturalist in The American Museum of Natural History, New York City, and reproduced through the courtesy of that institution.

Audacious Audubon

THE STORY OF A GREAT PIONEER,
ARTIST, NATURALIST & MAN

By Edward A. Muschamp

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To

the men and women of today who—in a hundred different fields—are still contending with the same obstinate forces that opposed

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

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AUDACIOUS AUDUBON

CHAPTER I

THE SPOILED BOY

I

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON was born on the eve —on the very rim, so to speak, of one of the most violent eruptions of human misery and vengeance recorded in history; and he was reared amidst the convulsions of another and even more devastating upheaval. Under the avalanches of consuming lava that poured down the mountain sides of these two fiery furnaces of wrath and indignation, tens of thousands of men, women and children—innocent and guilty alike—were buried and obliterated from the face of the earth.

But of such cataclysms audacity is a logical by-product and the potential heritage of the survivors. And John James Audubon survived both of these upheavals.

To this general fact should be added these two specific facts: His mother was a "creole de Saint-

Domingue," which means she was a direct descendant of the original French settlers on the West Indian island of Santo Domingo—than whom, it is pertinent to add, there have been few more daring and audacious adventurers; while his father was a native of France and the son of a fisherman, and from the day when as a fifteen-year-old boy he was wounded in a sea-fight and taken as a prisoner of war by the English, up to the time of his retirement for disability resulting from his services in the French Revolution, audacity had of necessity been one of the foremost factors in his adventurous and picturesque career.

It would have been a miracle of negation if the child of such a union, and of such times, had not possessed a capacity for audacity to an unusual degree. And chiefly because John James Audubon did possess that trait to a veritably super-human degree, he survived innumerable perils and triumphed over seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and in the end achieved so far beyond the measure of his conscious talents—remarkable as they were, that even while he still lived he was recognized and crowned as one of the world's outstanding geniuses.

2

How much of the true story of his birth Audubon ever knew will probably always be a matter of speculation and conjecture. If he really had any positive knowledge as to what the actual facts of the matter were, he guarded it with the utmost zeal; and the one person to whom he may have confided at least an intimation of his secret, his wife, showed herself to be equally cautious and discreet—just as in all the problems, difficulties and discouragements that confronted and harassed her husband throughout the greater part of his life, she proved herself to be a most uncommonly competent and understanding woman.

In all his public writings and utterances—notably the one specific but incomplete autobiographical sketch that he wrote, Audubon steadfastly maintained that he believed that he was born in the village of Mandeville in the then nominally Spanish province of Louisiana—a community located on the upper shore of Lake Ponchartrain and about twenty miles north of the present city of New Orleans; that his father was Captain Jean Audubon and his mother "a lady of Spanish extraction" whom his father married on one of his more or less

frequent visits to Louisiana; that "she was one of the victims during the ever-to-be lamented period of the negro insurrections" on the island of Santo Domingo, where Captain Audubon maintained a home and whither he took his family when they left Louisiana soon after the boy's birth; and, that following his mother's death he and his father journeyed to France where his father "married the only mother I have ever known." The precise period of his birth, he said, was an "enigma" to him.

"In his journals and letters," wrote his granddaughter many years after his death,[1] "various allusions are made to his age, and many passages bearing on the matter are found, but with one exception no two agree; he may have been born anywhere between 1772 and 1783, and in the face of his uncertainty the date usually given, May 5, 1780, may be accepted, though the true one is no doubt earlier."

Subsequently it became known that in certain of his journals and letters which have never been made public, Audubon implied that the great secret of his life was that Captain Jean Audubon was *not* his true father, that in reality he was of so-called "noble birth," and

[1] Maria R. Audubon in *Audubon and His Journals.*

that he had solemnly promised Captain Audubon—who was only his adopted father—that he would never reveal the details of that secret. Bearing on this "secret," but establishing no authenticated facts, are two Audubon family traditions. One is to the effect that some time after he came to the United States—he was eighteen years old when he arrived in New York—Audubon received, through his father but from an unknown source, a large sum of money; the inference being that this money came from the estate of his mother of whom he had once written that he had been told that she was "as wealthy as she was beautiful." The other is that at the time of the death of Audubon's younger son, which occurred eleven years after his father's death, Mrs. Audubon is reputed to have exclaimed, "Oh, my son, my son! to think that you should have died without having known the secret of your father's early life!" [1]—but that, when relatives asked her the significance of the exclamation, Mrs. Audubon declined to make any explanation other than that it was but an inadvertent expression such as any one might make under the stress of a great emotional shock.

[1] *Audubon the Naturalist*—See note "C" in Bibliography.

But with the discovery in France of supposedly non-existent documents,[1] many of which are of an official or semi-official character and most of which bear Captain Jean Audubon's signature as having been witnessed and sworn to before properly accredited authorities, it has been definitely established that John James Audubon was the natural son of Captain Audubon and a "Mlle. Rabin," and that he was born early in the morning of the twenty-sixth day of April in the year 1785, in the seaport town of Les Cayes, which is on the southwest coast of that part of the island of Santo Domingo now known as Haiti. These documents also show that Audubon's mother was a "creole de Saint-Domingue," that she had been in ill-health for some time before his birth and that she died within a year after his birth.

But, beyond these few facts—historically important though they are, the enigma still stands, as unsolved a secret as it ever was. To this day, no one knows who "Mlle. Rabin" was, or what she was, or what her outlook on life was. Even her name—it has been suggested and not without reason, may have been an

[1] To Professor Francis Hobart Herrick, the distinguished American biologist and ornithologist, belongs the credit for these important discoveries.

assumed one. Moreover, all the facts concerning Audubon's home environment and whatever parental training he received during his earliest years are equally obscure—save for the single fact that throughout this period his father was at the height of his commercial and financial prosperity and undoubtedly provided generously for the boy's every physical and material need.

But whether he was of the noblest or most plebeian birth, and whether his early training and home environment were good, bad or indifferent, the far more interesting—and possibly fully as important—fact remains that John James Audubon first saw the light of day on one of the rarest of Nature's island paradises, where the very air that first filled his tiny lungs was vibrant with the melody of many birds and fragrant with the perfume of many beautiful flowers. Here, amidst Nature's most gorgeous and most lavish endowments, Audubon lived the first four and a half years of his life—his sensitive and sympathetic being responding as unerringly to this particular phase of his environment as human nature must ever answer to the call and stimulus of the all-pervading Mother of this mundane sphere.

True, the fire and devastation that was soon to pour

its annihilating wrath upon the man-made institutions of this island paradise were already seething below the surface when Audubon was born. And from the cracks and crevices issued forth the ominous hissings and rumblings that forebode the coming cataclysm. But for a little boy playing in the garden by the side of his father's home, the nightingales and the cardinals of Les Cayes still sang their melodious songs, the stately flamingos and the brilliantly colored parrots still spread their gorgeous plumage, and the hills and the valleys of the tropical country-side were still resplendent in all the glory of their luxuriant foliage.

3

Whether Captain Audubon would have revealed all the facts about his son's birth and maternity if he had kept a diary or a private journal is, of course, entirely a matter of guess work. But the probabilities are that the pages of such a record, if they existed, would throw a frank and illuminating light on this much-mooted mystery. For Jean Audubon was one of those interesting but always more or less puzzling human beings that seem to have no hesitancy whatever about

flaunting the conventions of society yet at the same time possess a strong sense of moral and ethical responsibility and are more than willing to meet any obligations that may spring from that responsibility.

But even if he had omitted everything concerning his intimate family affairs, the journal of Captain Audubon would still be an exceedingly readable document and possessed of considerable historical value, for his experiences were wide and varied and his life covered one of the most momentous periods of modern times. He went to sea when he was thirteen years old as a cabin-boy on his father's ship. Two years later he was wounded in a battle between English and French sea forces off the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and spent five years in England as a prisoner of war. After his release he returned to the sea which he followed for more than two decades; making many voyages between French ports and the fishing banks off Newfoundland, and the West Indies—in the course of which he worked his way up from the ranks until he was in command of his own ship.

Between the perils of the deep and his frequent encounters with pirates and, during the American Revolution, with British privateers and warships, Captain Audubon led an exciting and adventurous life. Once

he was attacked by several English warships, and in the battle that followed—for Captain Audubon's vessel was heavily armed and he was not the kind of a man to give up without a struggle—most of his officers and crew were either killed or wounded, his ship with its valuable cargo was captured and later destroyed, and the Captain himself again taken as a prisoner after a daring attempt to escape in an open boat. Later, as the commander of one of the warships in the French fleet that was cooperating with the American colonists, he rendered aid to General Washington and his forces, and was present at the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown.

At the conclusion of the war, Captain Audubon, then thirty-nine years old, returned to Nantes which he had adopted as his home, and where, eleven years earlier, he had married a widow named Anne Moynet Ricordal. But his visit was a short one and he was soon off again in quest of his fortune. Madame Audubon, who was nine years older than her husband and had a small income of her own, did not accompany him on any of his voyages; being quite content, apparently, to remain safely and comfortably at home.

During the period intervening between the end of the American Revolution and the beginning of the

French Revolution, Captain Audubon spent practically all of his time in the West Indies. And when he set sail from Les Cayes late in the autumn of 1789, again headed for Nantes, but this time accompanied by his young son, a still younger daughter, Rose, who was a half-sister of the boy and likewise a native of Santo Domingo, and several negro slave servants, the doughty Captain possessed what he had every reason for believing was concrete and tangible evidence that he had at last achieved his fortune. Santo Domingo was at the height of its productivity, and as one of the leading planters, merchants and slave owners of the island, Captain Audubon had acquired a large share of the resulting prosperity. And of all the thoughts that were farthest from his mind, Fame was unquestionably the very remotest.

But it was the irony of Captain Audubon's fate—a fate that grew out of the uprisings of the negro slaves of Santo Domingo, which started soon after he left Les Cayes and resulted in a violent and destructive war in which each side killed, burned and destroyed everything that stood in its way, and the French Revolution which was just getting into full swing when he arrived at Nantes—that the greater part of his fortune should eventually be wiped out of existence, and that, in the

end, he should achieve that Fame of which he probably never dreamed, through the then relatively insignificant fact that he was the father of the four and a half year old boy who stood beside him on the deck of their ship as they looked back across the waters of the Caribbean at the slowly fading shore line of Santo Domingo.

4

Captain Audubon undoubtedly planned to settle down in Nantes and divide his time between his business interests and his family. He was wealthy and his properties in Santo Domingo, and those he had acquired in the United States, were in the hands of competent and responsible agents. He had had enough adventure to last him to the end of his days, and he was as devotedly attached to the two children he was bringing home from America, and as thoroughly desirous of giving them the best possible educational advantages, as the most conventional and orthodox father could possibly have been.

But Nantes, when Captain Audubon and his party arrived there along toward the end of 1789, next to

Paris, was the last place in the world where any Frenchman could have settled down to anything! Long a stronghold of the alert, intelligent and rapidly rising middle classes who in their own way resented the hold that the nobility and the clergy had on their nation quite as much as did the Marats and the Dantons, Nantes was aflame with the spirit of the Revolution. Its citizens were already marching and Captain Audubon, whose interests and sympathies were entirely on the side of the revolutionists, promptly joined their ranks, and with his customary ardor and enthusiasm plunged into the very thick of the struggle. About all that he had time to do in the way of "settling down" —for revolutions are as ruthless in exacting service as they are in administering punishment—was to turn his children over to his wife and leave them, for the time being, wholly in her care.

5

Enter now the first of the paradoxes that are to play such an important part in shaping John James Audubon's life—the paradox of the spoiled boy who was "spoiled" by his step-mother! and a foster step-

mother at that, who suddenly found herself confronted by as perplexing a problem in domestic relations as any woman was ever called upon to face.

Ay, and what a tragedy that foster step-mother might have made of that problem—that opportunity, as time proved it to be, that Fate and the ship from America had brought to her door—had she but permitted herself to be influenced and governed by the unkindliness and intolerance of a narrow and conventional outlook on life! But happily for posterity, and particularly America—to say nothing of those individuals whose lives comprised the very warp and woof of the problem—Madame Anne Moynet Audubon possessed not merely a kind but an understanding heart; and, what was equally important, she had the courage to look the World of Realities squarely in the face, and sufficient practical philosophy not merely to "put up" with things but actually to make the best of them.

See her now, as she sits there in her home in the Rue de Crebillon in the old central district of the city of Nantes—a rotund and motherly figure, comfortably fixed before the fire and smiling indulgently at the handsome little lad who is playing on the floor beside her. Already she loves him—this little stranger from a foreign land who bears such a curious relationship to

her and who has but lately come to live with her. And with that kindly and genuinely maternal instinct that is not infrequently the compensation of the childless woman, she has taken the boy to her heart as truly as she would have taken a child of her own.

"Yes, my mother!" wrote Audubon years afterwards,[1] "the only one I truly remember; and no son ever had a better, nor more loving one. Let no one speak of her as my 'step-mother.' I was ever to her as a son of her own flesh and blood, and she was to me a true mother."

But Madame Audubon did much more than lavish her love and affection on the boy. According to the boy himself, she "completely spoiled" him.

"She was devotedly attached to me, far too much so for my good," he once declared, "and was desirous that I should be brought up to live and die 'like a gentleman,' thinking that fine clothes and filled pockets were the only requisites needful to attain this end. She therefore completely spoiled me, hid my faults, boasted to everyone of my youthful merits, and worse than all, said frequently in my presence that I was the handsomest boy in France. All my wishes and idle notions were at once gratified; she went so far as actually to

[1] *Audubon and His Journals*—See note "A" in Bibliography.

grant me carte blanche at all the confectionery shops in the town, and also of the village of Coueron, where during the summer we lived, as it were, in the country."

All of which would certainly seem to be convincing evidence that at times Madame Audubon did let her generous and over-indulgent disposition take decided advantage of her better judgment. But in the light of what this "spoiled boy" eventually developed into, and the significant fact that he definitely began that development during the very period in which he was being "spoiled," there is just as much reason for believing that in adopting her policy of sparing the rod, Madame Audubon was guided by something approximating a very keen and intelligent appreciation of the boy's extremely sensitive and highly sympathetic nature—an understanding that could have come to her readily enough out of the single incident of the death of *Mignonne* the parrot, which occurred so soon after the lad came under Madame Audubon's care and observation and which had such a poignantly tragic effect on him. This incident, Audubon wrote in his account of the happenings of that memorable morning, "I have thought of thousands of times since . . . as one of the curious things which perhaps did lead me in after

times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite. My mother had several beautiful parrots and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, 'Pretty Polly' asking for her breakfast as usual, '*Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Mignonne,*' the man of the woods probably thought the bird presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room, I was tranquillized, the monkey was forever afterward chained, and *Mignonne* buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one."

But whether it was the death of *Mignonne* or some other incident that gave Madame Audubon her insight into the character of the boy, she carefully refrained from imposing any strict or harsh discipline upon him, and permitted him to do just about as he pleased. As

he grew older and she observed that he was more interested in the things of the country-side than he was in what was going on in the class room, she did not even insist that he apply himself to his studies. And many a morning, instead of going to school as his father supposed he was, the boy made for the fields and the woods, where he spent the day wandering and searching to his heart's content; returning to his home late in the afternoon, his lunch basket—emptied now of the "good eatables" which his thoughtful step-mother always provided for him—filled with birds' nests, birds' eggs, lichens, flowers and even pebbles.

Theoretically, of course, Madame Audubon was entirely wrong. But viewed against the background of all the tumult and horror that fairly inundated Nantes during those childhood days of Audubon, as the French Revolution swept along in its fiery and devastating course, one is virtually forced to the conclusion that, but for the very treatment that the boy did receive throughout those most formative and impressionable years of his life, the spirit that was to gladden and enlighten the hearts and minds of millions of his fellowmen would in all probability have been broken and crushed, and the bud that was John James Audubon would never have come to flower.

CHAPTER II

PATERNAL DISCIPLINE

I

IN the spring of 1793—Audubon was then just eight years old—Nantes became the storm center of one of the most harrowing phases of the whole French Revolution. Bitterly and fanatically opposed to the Revolution in general, and the Government's proposed levy of 300,000 soldiers in particular, the royalists and peasants of the adjoining department of La Vendée arose in revolt and marched on Nantes. Their first attack repulsed by the National Guard, the Vendeans beseiged the city and for three months the inhabitants were shut off from the rest of the nation. Neighboring villages were ravaged and burned. Sympathizers with the Revolution were massacred. Captured soldiers were tortured and murdered.

To suppress this rebellion, which before the year was out had reached such alarming proportions that it was menacing the Revolution, the Government at Paris

sent to Nantes Jean Baptiste Carrier, erstwhile country lawyer and now ardent Revolutionist, with orders to use the severest measures if need be, but to break the revolt. Thoroughly but ruthlessly Carrier fulfilled his commission. The streets of Nantes ran literally red with the blood of the victims, and the waters of the River Loire were choked with the bodies of the forcibly drowned men and women.

"Guillotining there was at Nantes," wrote Carlyle, "till the Headsman sank worn out: then fusillading 'in the Plain of Saint-Mauve'; little children fusilladed, and women with children at the breast; children and women, by the hundred and twenty; and by the five hundred so hot is La Vendée; till the very Jacobins grew sick, and all but the Company of Marat cried, Hold! . . . why waste a gabarre, sinking it with them? Fling them out; fling them out, with their hands tied: pour a continual hail of lead over all the space, till the last struggler of them be sunk!"

The closing act of this ghastly drama—the execution by shooting of Charette, the Vendean leader—Audubon did witness; and he has also recorded that he saw one of his aunts dragged through the streets of Nantes on the way to her death. But from the worst of this brutal and barbaric turmoil he was saved by the kindly and

humane indulgence of his foster step-mother; for so filled was his mind with the pleasures that came to him from his childish love of nature and his search for the interesting and curious things of the country-side that there was little room left in it for either the glamour or the horror of war.

2

By 1799 the flames of the Revolution had virtually burned themselves out. Robespierre had fallen under the knife of his own guillotine, the Directors had superseded the Revolutionary Tribunal, and Napoleon in turn had over-thrown the Directors and made himself "First Consul." Nantes was beginning to resume the customary ways of life, and John James Audubon, now fourteen years old and enjoying every encouragement that his step-mother could give him, was more deeply engrossed in his love of the fields and woods than ever, and correspondingly further away from his studies. Then came the day of reckoning.

Captain Audubon, still in the service of the Government, but with considerably more free time on his hands than he had had for several years, returned to Nantes

for a visit to his family. Yes, the Captain was deeply interested in his son's collection of birds' nests, eggs, lichens, pebbles, etc., thought them very fine, and complimented the boy on his taste for such things. But, what could he show as the result of his studies during all the time that his father had been away?

"When he inquired what else I had done," wrote Audubon in relating the incident to his own sons, "and I, like a culprit, hung my head, he left me without saying another word. Dinner over he asked my sister for some music, and, on her playing for him, he was so pleased with her improvement that he presented her with a beautiful book. I was next asked to play my violin, but alas! for nearly a month I had not touched it; it was stringless; not a word was said on that subject. 'Had I any drawings to show?' Only a few, and those not good. My good father looked at his wife, kissed my sister, and humming a tune left the room. The next morning at dawn of day my father and I were under way in a private carriage; my trunk, etc., were fastened to it, my violin case was under my feet, the postilion was ordered to proceed, my father took a book from his pocket, and while he silently read I was left entirely to my own thoughts. After some days' travelling we entered the gates of Rochefort. My father had scarcely

spoken to me, yet there was no anger exhibited in his countenance; nay, as we reached the house where we alighted, and approached the door, near which a sentinel stopped his walk and presented arms, I saw him smile as he raised his hat and said a few words to the man, but so low that not a syllable reached my ears. The house was furnished with servants, and everything seemed to go on as if the owner had not left it. My father bade me sit by his side, and taking one of my hands calmly said to me: 'My beloved boy, thou art now safe. I have brought thee here that I may be able to pay constant attention to thy studies; thou shalt have ample time for pleasure, but the remainder must be employed with industry and care.' . . ."

Here at Rochefort, where his father was then stationed and, as he told his son, could keep a watchful eye on him, young Audubon was enrolled in the military school, and compelled to apply himself to his studies. This unaccustomed confinement and strict application to books irritated him, and at the first opportunity—while his father was absent from the city—the boy escaped from his class room by jumping out a window. His liberty, which he occupied in wandering through some nearby gardens, was soon ended by a soldier who found him and took him back, not, how-

ever, to his class room, but to a prison ship, where he was held until his father returned.

After more than a year of this enforced schooling and rigid discipline Audubon and his father journeyed back to Nantes. There the boy spent another year at school, devoting most of his time to mathematics, as his father was then planning to make him an engineer. His leisure hours, however, were all spent in the fields and woods, and it was at this time that he began his first serious effort at making pencil and crayon sketches. Birds had fascinated him for as long as he could remember, and realizing now, as never before, that in life they always flew away and left him, and that in death they quickly lost that freshness of beauty and charm that was peculiarly pleasing to him, he determined to preserve their living images in the one way that his youthful mind instinctively suggested to him—he would draw their pictures. Those early sketches were crude and far from finished drawings—for Audubon was in no sense of the word a child prodigy—and gave no indication of the extraordinary talent that lay hidden within the boy. But as Audubon himself once remarked in commenting on them, "they were representative of birds and I felt pleased with them."

3

Like many parents—then, now, and probably for all time to come—Captain Audubon was doubtless both surprised and perplexed, if not actually provoked, when he found that his son was not a complete and perfect replica of himself; but rather, a combination of *some* of his father's traits and characteristics, *plus* certain definite ideas and interests that were inherently and peculiarly his own. In many respects, of course, they were exactly alike, particularly in such abstract qualities as persistency and determination. But the fundamental difference between them—as so often happens to be the difference between a father and a son—was that they were interested in totally different things. Consequently, it is quite probable that Captain Audubon never understood his son; for determined fathers of equally determined sons who have their own ideas about what they want to do with their lives rarely do.

But whether he did or did not understand his boy, Captain Audubon soon realized that there was a marked difference between them, and it is decidedly to his credit that he was willing to make a temporary compromise

between what he thought was best for his son and what the son himself thought he wanted to do. Accordingly John James Audubon, then seventeen years old, was sent up to Paris, where for a short period he studied at the Louvre under the direction and guidance of Jacques Louis David, at that time court painter to Napoleon, and but a little while before the artist-idol of the Revolution.

So far as is known this was the only formal art training Audubon ever received, and while he was disappointed that the master set him to drawing "eyes and noses belonging to giants, and heads of horses, represented in ancient sculpture" instead of his favorite birds and flowers, he nevertheless did acquire during this brief experience a rudimentary knowledge of certain principles that were of decided value to him in later years.

Why he did not continue his art studies for a longer period is not known, although it is not unlikely that his father's immediate financial circumstances had something to do with it. For fighting in the ranks of a revolution has never been a highly profitable occupation, and in Santo Domingo things had been rapidly going from bad to worse—at least from the viewpoint of the property owner. At all events, young Audubon was

soon back at Nantes and his father again confronted by the question as what to do with him.

In his unfinished autobiography Audubon says that his father "anxious as he was that I should be enrolled in Napoleon's army found it necessary to send me back to my own beloved country, the United States of America, and I came with intense and indescribable pleasure."

Possibly Captain Audubon was anxious for his son to take up a military career. But he had also been anxious for the boy to become an engineer, only to abandon that idea when he realized that it simply would not work. And by this time it must have been fully as apparent to him that his son was as little interested in war and the ambitions of Napoleon as he was in engineering. But whatever the reason, it was finally decided that America offered the best possible solution of the problem, and plans were made for the young man's emigration. In Philadelphia was Captain Audubon's trusted agent—one Miers Fisher; and a few miles outside of Philadelphia, near Norristown, the Captain owned an estate known as *Mill Grove* to which he had a short time before dispatched a business associate named Francis Dacosta. Young Audubon was to make his home either in Philadelphia or at *Mill Grove*, learn the

English language, and, acting under the advice and guidance of Fisher and Dacosta, establish himself in some profitable business.

But the future that awaited John James Audubon on the western side of the Atlantic was as far removed from his father's fondest plans and hopes as anything could possibly have been, and it was a truly prophetic shadow that the young man cast that autumn day in 1803 as he came aboard the ship that was to carry him from France to the United States. For in addition to all the customary luggage of a traveller setting forth on a long journey, young Audubon bore still another burden—if it may be so termed—that in every sense of the word was a symbolic forerunner of something that in the years ahead was to become a veritably inseparable part of him—a portfolio containing the entire collection of his boyhood drawings of birds.

Today, among the treasured relics in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, is one of the few surviving and justly famous Audubon portfolios—an enormous book-like folder, bound in leather and so large and so heavy that the average person would have difficulty even in lifting it, to say nothing of carrying it over half the United States and up and down endless miles of streets in Edinburgh, London, Paris

and a dozen other European cities as Audubon did throughout his long and discouraging struggle from backwoods obscurity to fame and world-wide recognition as one of the foremost, if not the greatest, artist-naturalist of all time.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUNG DANDY

I

CROSSING the Atlantic Ocean in the days of Audubon's youth was, for most people, an adventure in itself. Robert Fulton was still experimenting with what was generally regarded as his highly impracticable idea for building a steamboat, and even the most competent and widely experienced mariners—skilled though they were in the art of handling a sailing vessel, were still largely at the mercy of the elements. One of the most travelled men of the time wrote that he embarked at Amsterdam early in July 1805 for New York, and arrived after a voyage of 42 days, which was then looked upon as a very rapid one; while another has recorded that he was 58 days at sea between Liverpool and New York, delayed by calms and driven far off the course by storms that all but wrecked the ship. Even 10 weeks at sea was by no means an uncommon experience at the beginning of the

Nineteenth century, and many were the ships that sailed gayly out of their ports and were never heard of again.

But for young John James Audubon, leaving his home, his family and his friends for the first time, all the dangers of the Seven Seas rolled into one, and all the tediousness of the longest ocean voyage that he could possibly have taken, would have been as nothing compared to the overwhelming sense of homesickness that settled down on him as the last sight of land dropped below the horizon and he realized that he was heading into a new and unknown world and that behind him lay all that was near and dear to him. The joy and pleasure of starting vanished like a dream, and "while the breeze wafted along the great ship, hours were spent in deep sorrow or melancholy musings."

A picturesque, indeed a very handsome young man, with his fine and luxuriant head of hair falling in ringlets to his shoulders—but not a very cheerful or companionable shipmate. For he knows nothing of the future and thinks only of the past, and for long periods his tall, slim figure leans dejectedly against the deck rail, and out of those large, dark and rather deeply sunken eyes he gazes mournfully and longingly over

the wake of the ship and across the vast watery spaces that separate him from his homeland.

2

Nor was Audubon's actual introduction to the United States of a character calculated to revive his depressed spirits or drive away those melancholy longings to be back in France among his friends and amidst the familiar scenes of his childhood. For he had barely landed in New York when he was stricken with yellow fever. It was the fourth epidemic of this dread disease of the tropics to find its way into New York aboard the trading ships from the West Indies in less than a decade. The death toll ran into thousands, and there was scarcely a family in the city—which in those days did not extend much above Cortland street and Maiden Lane, and whose population numbered less than 80,000—but lost one or more members.

That John James Audubon's career did not end then and there and his youthful, fever-racked body reach a premature but final resting place in what is today Washington Square, but which in those yellow fever days was the burial grounds for the victims of the

epidemics, was due largely to the quick and decisive action of Captain John Smith, commander of the ship that had brought young Audubon to America. Knowing that the youth had neither relatives or friends in New York and that under those circumstances there was little or no chance of his getting either the medical or nursing attention that he should have if his life was to be saved, Captain Smith promptly removed the patient to Morristown, New Jersey, and there—in the home of two Quaker women who were friends of Captain Smith and Good Samaritans in the truest sense of the word, the young Frenchman was tenderly and efficiently cared for and finally nursed back to health and strength.

But homesickness and yellow fever were only the beginning of Audubon's troubles—troubles that were to dog his footsteps for more than two decades, albeit the coming months were destined to bring him, and through the merest chance at that, the acquaintance of the young woman who was to play a literally indispensable part in all his future activities and all his ultimate accomplishments.

When he had recovered from his illness his father's agent, Miers Fisher, drove over to Morristown and took the young man back with him to Philadelphia, and for a brief period he lived in the Fisher home which

was located in an out-lying district known as Fox Chase, now a part of the city. But this arrangement—which might so easily have decoyed Audubon into some prosaic and commonplace commercial success, if Miers Fisher had not failed to appreciate the fact that he was dealing with a decidedly determined, not to say headstrong young man—soon came to an end. Audubon knew that Fisher was one of his father's oldest and most trusted business associates, and as such, he respected him. But when he began to suspect that the venerable Quaker was seeking a matrimonial alliance between the two families, he decided that the time had arrived for him to assert what he believed were his rights, and acted accordingly. His own account of the incident is delightfully amusing in its naive frankness:

"Indeed it would seem that Mr. Fisher was actually desirous that I should become a member of his family," he wrote, "and this was evinced within a few days by the manner in which the good Quaker presented me to a daughter of no mean appearance, but toward whom I happened to take an unconquerable dislike. Then he was opposed to music of all descriptions, as well as dancing, could not bear me to carry a gun, or fishing rod, and, indeed, condemned most of my amusements. All these things were difficulties toward accomplishing

a plan which, for aught I know to the contrary, had been premeditated between him and my father, and rankled the heart of the kindly, if somewhat strict Quaker. They troubled me much also; at times I wished myself anywhere but under the roof of Mr. Fisher, and at last I reminded him that it was his duty to install me on the estate to which my father had sent me."

There is considerable evidence for believing that Captain Audubon *would* have preferred his son to remain under Miers Fisher's guidance and guardianship, and that in the vernacular of a later day the young Frenchman was simply "bluffing" the old Quaker. But bluff or no bluff, Audubon finally had his own way in the matter, and the early part of 1804 saw him, for the time being, at least, comfortably and happily settled in his first home in America, *Mill Grove*, a farm-estate of nearly 300 acres, located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania—almost within the proverbial stone's throw of historic Valley Forge, and about twenty miles north-west of Philadelphia.

3

Behold now, not the young naturalist, but the young dandy. For that is exactly what Audubon became im-

mediately after his arrival at *Mill Grove*. His escape from the home of Miers Fisher he regarded as a "true deliverance," and having no particular plans for the future he was in a mood to welcome any kind of a change.

"I was what in plain terms may be called extremely extravagant," is the frank way in which he pictured himself during this interesting period. "I had no vices, it is true, neither had I any high aims. I was ever fond of shooting, fishing and riding on horse-back; the raising of fowls of every sort was one of my hobbies, and to reach the maximum of my desires in those different things filled every one of my thoughts. I was ridiculously fond of dress. To have seen me going shooting in black satin smallclothes, or breeches, with silk stockings, and the finest ruffled shirts Philadelphia could afford, was, as I now realize, an absurd spectacle, but it was one of my foibles, and I shall not conceal it. I purchased the best horses in the country, and rode well, and felt proud of it; my guns and fishing tackle were equally good, always expensive and richly ornamented, often with silver. Indeed, though in America, I cut as many foolish pranks as a young dandy in Bond Street or Piccadilly. . . . I was extremely fond of music, dancing and drawing; in all

I had been well instructed, and not an opportunity was lost to confirm my propensities in those accomplishments. I was, like most young men, filled with the love of amusement, and not a ball, a skating match, a house or riding party took place without me."

Indeed young Audubon was quite the sensation of the country-side, and fortunately, the vivid and colorful impression that he made on his neighbors was graphically recorded by one of them—David Pawling, when he wrote: "Today I saw the swiftest skater I ever beheld; backwards and forwards he went like the wind, even leaping over large air-holes fifteen or more feet across, and continuing to skate without an instant's delay. I was told he was a young Frenchman, and this evening I met him at a ball, where I found his dancing exceeded his skating; all the ladies wished him as a partner; moreover, a handsomer man I never saw, his eyes alone command attention; his name Audubon, is strange to me."

In later years Audubon referred to himself during this period as a "popinjay" and evidently was not particularly proud of himself either as a "dandy" or "gay young country squire." Nevertheless *Mill Grove* did provide exactly the kind of a psychological tonic that the handsome and talented, but thoroughly dis-

pirited young Frenchman most needed at this critical time, and under the beneficent influence of those carefree days homesickness, illness and all his other trials and tribulations receded so far into the background of his consciousness that they were all but forgotten. Life was indeed well worth living, and as Nature played her enchanting and entrancing tunes, the soul of John James Audubon expanded joyously, and his body, stirred once more to its natural vigor and activity, danced to his heart's delight.

With this mental and physical readjustment came renewed interest in birds and all the other living creatures of the woodlands, and afoot or astride his favorite horse he roamed and wandered at will—gunning, sketching and exploring as his fancy dictated.

One morning while walking along the banks of the Perkiomen Creek, Audubon discovered a cave. In this cave he found a nest of pewees—which, incidentally, were the first American birds to especially interest him. Like every one who has given even the most cursory thought to birds, young Audubon had long wondered about the mysteries of bird migrations, and prompted more by curiosity, probably, than anything else, he decided to make an experiment. Catching several of

the young pewees, as he afterwards wrote, he "fixed a light silver thread on the leg of each, loose enough not to hurt the part, but so fastened that no exertions of theirs could remove it." [1] The birds were then released. Thus Audubon made the first American experiment in bird-banding, and it was a successful experiment, too, for a year or so later he found two of his "marked" pewees, returned from their winter's migrations to the South and nesting close by the place of their birth. Today bird-banding is a recognized line of scientific ornithological research and has played an important part in solving some of the most puzzling phases of bird migrations.

His room in the old *Mill Grove* homestead, where he lived with the Quaker tenants, William Thomas and his wife, Audubon made into a veritable museum of natural history. The walls, wrote one of his future brothers-in-law, "were festooned with all sorts of birds' eggs, carefully blown out and strung on a thread. The chimney-place was covered with stuffed squirrels, raccoons and opossums; and the shelves around were likewise crowded with specimens, among which were fishes, frogs, snakes, lizards and other reptiles. Besides

[1] *Audubon the Naturalist.*

these stuffed varieties, many paintings were arrayed upon the walls, chiefly of birds."

According to this same observer, Audubon was at this particular time especially "notable for the elegance of his figure and the beauty of his features, and he aided nature by careful attendance to his dress," to all of which may well be appended these few additional strokes from the naive pen of Audubon himself: "Withal, and fortunately for me, I was not addicted to gambling; cards I disliked, and I had no other evil practices. I was, besides, temperate to an *intemperate* degree. I lived, until the day of my union with your mother, on milk, fruits and vegetables, with the addition of game and fish at times, but never had I swallowed a single glass of wine or spirits until the day of my wedding. The result has been my uncommon, indeed, iron constitution. . . . Pies, puddings, eggs, milk or cream was all I cared for in the way of food, and many a time I robbed my tenant's wife, Mrs. Thomas, of the cream intended to make butter for the Philadelphia market. All this time I was as fair and as rosy as a girl, though as strong, indeed stronger than most young men, and as active as a buck."

Certainly a much more engaging and potential per-

sonality than the homesick and melancholy young immigrant who had but a short time before landed at New York; and prime, now, for the romantic and highly important experience that is just ahead of him.

CHAPTER IV

HIS FIRST AND ONLY LOVE AFFAIR

I

ABOUT the first thing young Audubon did after he arrived at *Mill Grove* was to make up his mind that he would have nothing to do with his new neighbor, William Bakewell, who had recently purchased the adjoining farm and whose home *Fatland Ford*, was less than a mile down the road toward the Schuylkill River. For Bakewell was an Englishman, and John James Audubon—having arrived at the mature age of nineteen, *knew* that all Englishmen were perfidious and not to be trusted under any circumstances! Moreover, the impetuous and rather strongly opinionated young Frenchman had not forgotten that his own father, when a boy, had been wounded in a battle with the English and held in England for five years as a prisoner of war. So when William Bakewell called at *Mill Grove* and not finding "the gay young squire" at home, left his card, Audubon deliberately ignored

his neighbor's friendly gesture and steadfastly refused to go anywhere near *Fatland Ford.*

But some time later when he was out gunning, who should he meet but this very Englishman, and in a way the meeting was decidedly embarrassing to young Audubon. For to his surprise and chagrin he discovered that William Bakewell was, first of all, a genuinely friendly and thoroughly cultured human being, with interests quite akin to his own, and, only incidentally an Englishman!—always a shocking and well-nigh unbelievable discovery to any one whose preconceived opinions have sprung from a nationalistic prejudice. However, he proved himself fully equal to the occasion. He admired his neighbor's well-trained dogs, frankly apologized for his former discourtesy in not acknowledging Mr. Bakewell's visit at *Mill Grove,* and promised to call on him and his family at the first opportunity.

"Well do I recollect the morning, and may it please God that I may never forget it, when for the first time I entered Mr. Bakewell's dwelling," wrote Audubon in telling the sequel to his chance meeting with William Bakewell—a meeting, incidentally, that proved to be the introductory step that led to the first of the two most fortunate things that ever happened to John

James Audubon. " . . . I was shown into a parlor where only one young lady was snugly seated at her work by the fire. She rose on my entrance, offered me a seat, and assured me of the gratification her father would feel on his return, which, she added, would be in a few moments, as she would dispatch a servant for him. Other ruddy cheeks and bright eyes made their transient appearance, but like spirits gay, soon vanished from my sight; and there I sat, my gaze riveted, as it were, on the young girl before me, who, half working, essayed to make the time pleasant to me. Oh! may God bless her! It was she, my dear sons, who afterwards became my beloved wife, and your mother. Mr. Bakewell soon made his appearance, and received me with the manner and hospitality of a true English gentleman. The other members of the family were soon introduced to me, and 'Lucy' was told to have luncheon produced. She now arose from her seat a second time, and her form, to which I had previously paid but partial attention, showed both grace and beauty; and my heart followed every one of her steps. The repast over, guns and dogs were made ready. Lucy, I was pleased to believe, looked upon me with some favor, and I turned more especially to her on leaving. I felt that certain '*je ne sais quoi*' which in-

timated that, at least, she was not indifferent to me."

Thus began Audubon's one and only love affair. And although the charms and graces of the feminine character never failed to strike a responsive chord within him, and although he once frankly admitted that "women have great power over me at any time, and perhaps under all circumstances," there is not the slightest evidence—from the moment that he first laid eyes on Lucy Bakewell up to the hour of his death—that any other woman ever even so much as touched the very fringe of his affections. Surely as ardent, as constant, and as devoted a lover—and in the truest and finest sense of the word Audubon was always more of a lover than a husband—as was ever revealed within the pages of an imaginative romance.

2

But Audubon had no sooner fallen in love with Lucy Bakewell than his troubles began all over again. For upon discovering that the young lady was as deeply in love with him as he was with her, and suggesting, therefore, that the logical thing for them to do was to get married, he immediately found himself facing

vigorous objections from the heads of both of their families. Mr. Bakewell thought that his daughter, who was only 17 years old, was entirely too young to be married. He liked Audubon well enough, and admired his obvious talents, but felt that it would be decidedly better if the young couple delayed their marriage until they were both a little older and until the prospective husband had established himself in some kind of a business that would enable him to take care of a wife.

Certainly a reasonable enough viewpoint, and the probabilities are that Audubon—conscious as he was of the generally favorable light in which he was regarded by the whole Bakewell family, would eventually have agreed to abide by that viewpoint, but for the more serious complications that arose on his own side of the case.

According to Audubon's version of the affair, he was made a partial victim of a vicious conspiracy which aimed to deceive his own father, separate him from his beloved Lucy, break their engagement, and secretly ship him to the Far East, with Francis Dacosta —the very man that Captain Audubon had sent to *Mill Grove* to look after certain of his interests, including the general welfare and well-being of his son—playing the role of chief villain and arch-conspirator. He also

charged Dacosta with being "a covetous wretch, who did all he could to ruin my father, and indeed swindled both of us to a large amount"; adding for good measure, that "a greater scoundrel than Dacosta never probably existed," and then, as a half penitential afterthought, "but peace be with his soul."

There is no question but that Dacosta did interfere in his protege's love affair, and Audubon, being the determined and impassioned young Lothario that he was, this in itself was sufficient to bring down on Dacosta's head the full measure of Audubon's wrath and indignation. In fact, it almost cost Dacosta his life! But how much of this interference was voluntary on Dacosta's part or in excess of the authority delegated to him by Captain Audubon, and to what extent he was merely attempting to execute the Captain's orders, it is not possible to say. In one of several letters to Dacosta [1] bearing on this subject Captain Audubon said: "My son speaks (writes) to me about his marriage. If you would have the kindness to inform me about his intended, as well as about her parents, their manners, their conduct, their means, and why they are in that country, whether it was in consequence of misfortune that they left Europe, you will be doing me a

[1] *Audubon the Naturalist.*

signal service, and I beg you, moreover to oppose this marriage until I may give my consent to it. Tell these good people (the Bakewells) that my son is not at all rich, and that I can give him nothing if he marries in this condition." And later, in another letter he added: "I am (vexed) Sir; one cannot be more vexed at the fact that you should have reason to complain about the conduct of my son, for the whole thing, when well considered, is due only to bad advice, and lack of experience; they have goaded his self-esteem, and perhaps he has been immature enough to boast in the house to which he goes, that this plantation should fall to him, to him alone. You have every means to destroy this presumption; it is known at Philadelphia that you have the same rights as I have, and that you are doing nothing but for our mutual advantage. I am writing to him on this subject, for he does not speak of it to me, and I am giving him the rebuke that his indiscretion deserves. Read this letter, and have the kindness to seal it before delivering it to him. . . . Only an instant is needed to make him change from bad to good; his extreme youth and his petulance are his only faults, and if you will have the goodness to give him the indispensable, he will soon feel the necessity of making friends with you, and he can be of great service

if you use him for your own benefit. It is necessary then, my dear Sir, that we endeavor, by gentleness, to reclaim him to his duty. If you are indulgent with him, it will be I who should be under every obligation to you. I hope that the enclosed letter will work a change with him. This is my only son, my heir, and I am old. When Mr. Miers Fisher shall have shown my letter to the would-be father-in-law, he will see that he is mistaken in his calculations upon the assumed marriage of his daughter, for if it should take place without my consent, all help on my part would cease from that instant; this, if you will have the kindness, is what you may say to the would-be father-in-law, that I do not wish my son to marry so young."

Captain Audubon's suspicions regarding the Bakewell family, and particularly his son's "would-be father-in-law," were certainly not well founded, as subsequent events amply proved. For John James Audubon never had a more loyal and a more willing-to-help-him group of friends than the members of his wife's family, especially in the person of that same "would-be father-in-law." So if the Captain was as grossly misinformed on this phase of the matter as he apparently was, it is not unlikely that he was also misinformed as to the conduct of his son. All of which

would seem to substantiate, to some extent, at least, the charges that his son made against Dacosta.

At all events affairs at *Mill Grove* came to a climax when, according to Audubon, Dacosta told the young suitor that his affections for Miss Bakewell were "rash and inconsiderate," spoke triflingly of her and her parents, and said that for a man of young Audubon's rank and expectations to marry Lucy Bakewell was out of the question.

"If I laughed at him or not I cannot tell you," wrote Audubon, "but of this I am certain, that my answers to his talks on this subject so exasperated him that he immediately afterwards curtailed my usual income, made arrangements to send me to India and wrote my father accordingly. Understanding from many of my friends that his plans were fixed, and finally hearing from Philadelphia, whither Dacosta had gone, that he had taken my passage from Philadelphia to Canton, I walked to Philadelphia, entered his room quite unexpectedly, and asked him for such an amount of money as would enable me at once to sail for France and there see my father. The cunning wretch, for I cannot call him by any other name, smiled and said, 'Certainly, my dear sir,' and afterwards gave me a letter of credit on a Mr. Kauman, a half-agent, half

banker, then residing in New York. I returned to *Mill Grove,* made all preparatory plans for my departure, bid a sad adieu to my Lucy and her family, and walked to New York . . . the country lay under a covering of snow, but withal I reached New York on the third day, late in the evening."

And the winter that year was the coldest and severest that Philadelphia and the surrounding country had experienced in nearly half a century, with the Delaware River frozen to a depth of 22 inches.

"The next day," continues the narrative, "I called on Mr. Kauman; he read Dacosta's letter, smiled, and after a while told me he had nothing to give me, and in plain terms said that instead of a letter of credit, Dacosta—that rascal!—had written and advised him to have me arrested and shipped to Canton. The blood rose to my temples, and well it was that I had no weapon about me, for I feel even now quite assured that his heart must have received the result of my wrath."

By this time Audubon was in such a rage that he determined to return to Philadelphia and murder Dacosta. But friends, including Benjamin Bakewell, a brother of his "would-be father-in-law," to whom Audubon had presented a letter of introduction from

Lucy's father, persuaded him to give up that violent idea. Moreover, "Uncle" Benjamin Bakewell—then a prosperous importer—generously advanced the money needed for the trip across the ocean. Passage was taken on the happily named brig *Hope*, bound direct for Nantes, and exulting in the good turn that his fortune had suddenly taken in having completely out-witted his enemies, Audubon departed from New York "leaving Dacosta and Kauman in a most exasperated state of mind."

3

Fortunately, at the time Audubon sailed for France —along toward the latter part of January, 1805— Samuel F. B. Morse was only a fourteen-year-old boy, Cyrus W. Field was yet unborn, and the Marconi family was still two generations removed from its most celebrated and distinguished member. And so, aided by a favoring gale, he reached Nantes in less than a month, and was thus able to tell his whole story to his father long before letters arrived from Dacosta relating *his* version of the young man's latest "escapade." Face to face with his father, Audubon had little diffi-

culty in pleading his case. The Captain, apparently, was quickly convinced that Miss Bakewell was a most estimable young lady, and that her family—especially her father, were fully up to the Audubon standard. But like "Giorgio Merulla" in *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci,* he did insist that "to watch how the birds fly, how the grasses in the field grow" was "not learning, but pastime and play for children" and hardly an occupation calculated to support a wife and maintain a home! In brief, Captain Audubon agreed completely with Mr. Bakewell that the couple were much too young to get married and that they should wait until they were several years older—certainly until the bride-groom-to-be was earning enough money to provide for a family.

Whether young Audubon's report on Francis Dacosta's conduct with respect to *Mill Grove* was responsible for the subsequent break between Dacosta and Captain Audubon, it is impossible to say. The root of the trouble was an old lead mine on the *Mill Grove* property that, according to tradition, had provided bullets for the American colonists in the Revolutionary War, and which had been re-discovered about the time John James Audubon reached the Pennsylvania plantation. Dacosta had purchased a part interest in *Mill*

Grove and attempted to re-develop the mine. After Captain Audubon had put into the project all the ready money he possessed, he persuaded his old friend François Rozier, a prosperous business man of Nantes, to invest some of his money in the mine. Rozier, in turn, to protect his investment, took a mortgage on *Mill Grove,* in which, incidentally, John Augustin Provost who had sold the property to Captain Audubon also had some interest, along with William Thomas, the tenant of the farm, who had been given a small interest to "hold him" because Dacosta feared that he —Thomas—knew more about the mine's value than he admitted! As might well be imagined from this mixed-up ownership, the whole project finally became hopelessly complicated, and had to be taken into the courts to be even partially straightened out. So far as is known nobody ever made any profit out of the mine. After Audubon's return to America, *Mill Grove* was sold to Dacosta subject to mortgages taken to protect the Audubon and Rozier interests. Eventually the place passed into the hands of the Wetherill family of Philadelphia, to whom credit is due for the fact that the first home of John James Audubon in America has been preserved to this day in much the same state that it was in when the naturalist lived there, and, under

such romantic difficulties courted and won the fair Lucy Bakewell.

4

Audubon remained in France a little more than a year, spending most of his time searching for birds and making drawings of them. But the period was hardly propitious for the study of ornithology. The republic, as Audubon himself declared, "had, as it were, dwindled into a half-monarchical, half-democratic era. Bonaparte was at the height of success, overflowing the country as the mountain torrent overflows the plains in its course. Levies, or conscription, were the order of the day, and my name being French my father felt uneasy lest I should be forced to take part in the political strife of those days. I underwent a mockery of an examination, and was received as midshipman in the navy, went to Rochefort, was placed on board a man-of-war, and ran a short cruise."

As soon as the cruise ended Audubon and his friend, Ferdinand Rozier, son of Captain Audubon's old business associate, were literally smuggled out of the country. The Captain, although still nominally attached to

the French navy, had in some way procured passports for his son and young Rozier. Audubon's declared that he was born in New Orleans, while Rozier's passport was a Dutch one, though he did not understand a single word in that language! At St. Nazaire a Government official came on board the ship to examine the papers of the passengers, and when he looked at Audubon's passport he said—much to the young traveller's relief as well as his surprise: "My dear Mr. Audubon, I wish you joy; would to God that I had such papers; how thankful I should be to leave unhappy France under the same passport."

The flight to America was full of excitement and adventure.

"Among the passengers was a handsome Virginian girl, young and graceful," reads Audubon's record of the voyage. "She was constantly honored by the attentions of two Frenchmen who belonged to the nobility; both were fine young fellows, travelling, as was not uncommon then, under assumed names. One lovely day the bonnet of the fair lady was struck by a rope and knocked overboard. One of the French chevaliers at once leaped into the ocean, captured the bonnet, and had the good fortune to be picked up himself by the yawl. On reaching the deck he presented the bonnet

with graceful obeisance and perfect *sang froid,* while the rival looked at him as black as a raven. No more was heard of the matter till dawn, when reports of fire arms were heard; the alarm was general, we feared pirates. On gaining the deck it was found that a challenge had been given and accepted, a duel had positively taken place, ending, alas! in the death of the rescuer of the bonnet. The young lady felt this deeply and indeed it rendered us all very uncomfortable."

About a fortnight after leaving France—and just at the time when England was on the point of declaring a blockade of the whole western coast of Europe—Audubon's ship *The Polly* was pursued, fired on and finally overtaken by the English privateer *Rattlesnake* —an ominous name for Audubon, as later happenings will show. Despite the fact that *The Polly's* papers showed clearly that the ship was an American vessel, and despite the protests of Captain Sammis, the commander, and many of the passengers including an American Congressman, "the English officers who had come on board," says Audubon, "robbed the ship of almost everything that was nice in the way of provisions, took our pigs and sheep, coffee and wines, and carried off our two best sailors. . . . *The Rattlesnake* kept us under her lee, and almost within pistol shot,

for a whole day and night, ransacking the ship for money, of which we had a good deal in the run beneath a ballast of stone. Although this was partially removed they did not find the treasure." Audubon and Rozier saved their own gold—of which they were carrying a considerable sum, by wrapping it in some clothing and hiding it under a cable in the bow of the ship.

Thirty miles off New York a fishing boat warned Captain Sammis to be on the lookout for two British frigates that had fired another American ship, shot a man and impressed a number of seamen. *The Polly* put about immediately, sailed for the east end of Long Island Sound, was caught in a gale, driven on a sand-bar, floated off on high tide, and finally arrived in New York on May 26, 1806, after a voyage lasting 44 days.

CHAPTER V

THE WOULD-BE MERCHANT

I

ONE of Audubon's ultimate achievements was a feat of salesmanship that, all things considered, has probably never been surpassed—even in this Twentieth Century of super-salesmanship. But when he was a young man, and the World was doing its best to make a merchant of him, he turned out to be the flattest kind of a failure and the whole undertaking proved to be as absurd as it was futile, with Audubon himself playing as big a part in the fiasco as any of his relatives or friends, all of whom, with the single exception of his wife, were sincerely convinced that they knew exactly *what* he should do and exactly *how* he should do it.

True, his interest in birds and his ambition to preserve their likenesses on paper were keener than ever. Also, he was thoroughly conscious of the fact that his efforts along this line showed marked and steady improvement. But he had little or no conception of the

amazing capacity of his talents either as an artist or as an ornithologist, and nothing that even remotely approximated a life plan of work. He was, primarily, a young man ardently in love and more than anxious to get married. So he turned to business as the one means through which he assumed that he, like the average young man, could earn enough to support a wife and maintain a home.

2

Before leaving France, Audubon and his friend Ferdinand Rozier, assisted by their respective fathers, had drawn up and signed a most punctiliously worded agreement for a business partnership, which they solemnly pledged themselves not to dissolve under any circumstances, short of the death of one or the other of the partners, for nine years. But before this partnership actually went into effect, and following their unsuccessful attempt to develop the *Mill Grove* mine immediately after their return to America and the final sale of the property to Dacosta, both young men decided, in accordance with the advice and suggestions of their relatives, that it would be well worth their while to

get some first hand American business experience before they undertook to engage in trade on their own account. So Rozier associated himself with a Philadelphia importer named Laurence Huron, while Audubon went to New York where he entered the employ of his uncle-to-be Benjamin Bakewell, whose place of business and home were located at 175 Pearl Street.

Audubon remained in New York for a little less than a year, during which time he made a sincere but far from successful attempt to master the mysteries and intricacies of the importing and exporting business. On one occasion he made a decidedly unprofitable investment in indigo, and on another—just by way of illustrating his absent-mindedness so far as business was concerned, and, as he himself admitted, his general unsuitability for a mercantile career—he actually mailed a letter containing $8000 without sealing it! But if he failed to become one of Benjamin Bakewell's "bright young men," Audubon quickly won his way into the heart and confidences of Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchell, then one of New York's most eminent citizens and a distinguished naturalist and scientist. All his spare time was devoted to wandering through the surrounding country and along the nearby water fronts, sketching for his own amusement, and gunning for birds and

animals which he prepared for Dr. Mitchell's collection.

However, as the summer of 1807 drew to a close Audubon and Rozier both decided that the time had arrived for them to strike out into the West, establish a general store and make their fortunes selling merchandise to the thousands of emigrants then swarming over the Allegheny Mountains and on into the new Land of Opportunity—the rich Ohio valley country. Louisville, Kentucky, a bustling community of about 1000 persons, was chosen as an ideal place for them to settle. A goodly supply of merchandise was purchased —largely through credit given them by Benjamin Bakewell—and loaded into Conestoga wagons and started on its way for Pittsburg. And on August 31, the two young merchants themselves climbed into a stage coach in Market Street, Philadelphia, and began their journey across the "wilds" of Pennsylvania.

3

Today, tens of thousands of motor cars daily whiz their way over the broad concrete highways that mark the course of that famous old stage route to the West—through the once-sparsely settled communities of Lan-

caster, Elizabethtown, Middletown, Harrisburg, Carlisle, Shippensburg, Chambersburg, McConnellsburg, Bedford, Somerset, Greensburg and on to the great city that now stands at the juncture of the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers; and their passengers—riding in all the comfort and luxury of an age of marvelous mechanical invention—complete the journey between the rising and the setting of the sun. But in the early years of the Nineteenth century it required from 7 to 10 days to make the 300 mile trip from Philadelphia to Pittsburg, even if you travelled by the fastest stage; while from 20 to 35 days were consumed in transporting freight over the same route. Moreover, the journey was an almost continuous succession of hardships, discomforts, and more or less hazardous experiences.

"The trip had few agreeable features except its scenery at several points on the way," wrote John Melish, one of the early English travellers in America. "The inns were of the worst description. Passengers might swallow their hunger and wait, even though it was meal time, until the wagon reached the stage house which the line chose to favor. They had many opportunities to dismount for grog, a mixture of rum and water. They travelled half the night, walked much of

the time in hilly places, which was often preferable to being jolted over the vile roads, and reached their journey's end in an indescribable state of soil and fatigue. Rattlesnakes abounded in the mountains and were often encountered on the way." The Conestoga wagon was met with everywhere—carrying women, children and household goods, while the men walked, reads another description [1] of that pioneer route to the West—much of which is today known to millions of motorists as the Lincoln Highway. "Stage coaches dodged in and out among the Conestoga wagons. Droves of live stock on their way to market raised clouds of dust. All came to rest at the road houses—the drover, the wagoner, the stage driver and his passengers."

The last leg of the journey, from Pittsburg to Louisville, was made down the Ohio River on a flatboat, and before cold weather set in the firm of "Audubon & Rozier, Merchants" was definitely established and doing a good business. Sales were brisk and the outlook encouraging. When spring came Audubon decided that his financial prospects were sufficiently good to justify him in taking upon his shoulders the responsibility of supporting a family. So he journeyed back to Phila-

[1] *Philadelphia—A History of the City and Its People.*

delphia and on April 8, 1808, he and his beloved Lucy Bakewell were married at the Bakewell home *Fatland Ford*. Audubon was just a few weeks short of his twenty-third birthday, while his wife was three years his junior.

For some months after the bride and groom returned to Louisville the firm of "Audubon & Rozier" continued to prosper. Later, however, competition began cutting into their trade. Sales fell off, and creditors began pressing for settlements. Thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Audubon and her father, William Bakewell, the enterprise was probably saved from bankruptcy. With Mrs. Audubon's approval, her share of her father's estate—170 acres of the *Fatland Ford* plantation—was sold and the money realized, a sum close to $8000, was deposited in New York to the credit of the struggling young merchants. But business did not improve, and in the Spring of 1810 Audubon, his wife, their less-than-a-year-old son Victor, Rozier, and all their merchandise and household goods moved 120 miles down the Ohio to the town of Henderson. Here they were again disappointed. The community was small and there was little demand for merchandise.

By December Audubon and Rozier determined to try their luck somewhere along the Mississippi. Ar-

rangements were made for Mrs. Audubon and her son to remain with friends in Henderson, and, wrote Audubon,[1] "putting our goods, which consisted of 300 barrels of whiskey, sundry drygoods and powder on board a keel-boat, my partner, my clerk and self departed in a severe snowstorm. The boat was new, staunch and well trimmed, and had a cabin in her bow. A long steering oar, made of the trunk of a slender tree, about 60 feet in length, and shaped at its outer extremity like the fin of a dolphin, helped to steer the boat, while the four oars from the bow impelled her along, when going with the current, about 5 miles an hour." But just before they reached the point where the Ohio empties into the Mississippi, the winter storms became so severe that they were compelled to seek safety in the harbor of a small stream called "Cash Creek"—a short distance above the site of the present city of Cairo. There they learned that the Mississippi was jammed with ice—and there they stayed for weeks.

When the spring thaw came the journey was resumed. Arriving at the Mississippi, the migrating merchants turned their keel-boat northward and after a hard struggle against both water and ice they finally

[1] *The Life of John James Audubon The Naturalist*—See note "B" in Bibliography.

reached Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, an old French settlement about twenty miles below St. Louis. There they landed, and once more—and for the last time, as events were soon to prove—the firm of "Audubon & Rozier" again sought to establish itself on a sound and profitable basis. Business was good from the beginning. The large quantity of whiskey they had brought down the Ohio from Henderson, and for which they had paid 25 cents a gallon, sold readily for $2.00 a gallon. There was also a demand for their general merchandise, and if John James Audubon had been any other human being but the identical one that he happened to be, there is every reason for believing that the firm of "Audubon & Rozier" would have grown rapidly into one of the most successful of the pioneer business houses of the Middle West—just as Ferdinand Rozier, alone, did succeed after he and Audubon had dissolved their partnership.

But John James Audubon was still a young man of whims, not very certain as to what he wanted, but decidedly pronounced in his views as to what he did *not* want or like. And he did not like the town of Ste. Genevieve which he declared was "not so large as dirty." Furthermore, he didn't like the people who lived there, and at heart he wasn't any more interested

in the mercantile business in Ste. Genevieve—even if he and his partner were making 700 percent on their whiskey—than he had been in New York when he was working for Benjamin Bakewell and losing money on indigo and mailing letters containing thousands of dollars without even remembering to seal them. To cap the climax, he was lonely and longed to be back in Henderson with his wife and child. So that most carefully worded agreement between the two young merchants, which they had solemnly pledged themselves not to break under any circumstances before 1815, was nevertheless dissolved soon after they reached Ste. Genevieve, in the spring of 1811—Rozier buying his partner's share of the business and paying him partly in cash and partly in notes.

On his way back to Henderson, Audubon met with a hair-raising experience that came within an ace of costing him his life. He had been walking all day, following an old Indian trail across the prairies. As night came on he sought shelter in a small log cabin. Here he found a surly mannered woman and a young Indian buck who, though he appeared to be well acquainted with the woman was apparently not on very friendly terms with her. His watch, Audubon noticed, instantly attracted the woman's attention, and he became doubly

suspicious of her when, at the first opportunity, the Indian warned him to be on his guard against treachery.

After eating his supper, and under the pretense that he wanted to see what the weather prospects might be, Audubon took up his gun and walked out of the cabin. He slipped a ball into each barrel, scraped the edges of his flint, renewed the primings and returning to the hut gave a favorable report of his observations. Then calling his dog to his side he lay down on a pile of bear skins—his gun close to his body; and to all appearances he was soon fast asleep. Nearby lay the young Indian also feigning sleep. Before many minutes had passed two young men, who turned out to be the woman's sons, entered the cabin bearing a dead stag on a pole. The woman pointed to the supposedly sleeping figures of the white man and the Indian, and Audubon heard whispered references to his watch. A whiskey bottle passed back and forth between the woman and her two sons. The woman began sharpening a large carving knife.

But Audubon's own account of what happened that night in that lonely log cabin far out on the prairie is infinitely more graphic and thrilling than any second-hand version could possibly be.

"I watched her," he wrote, "working away with the

dangerous instrument, until the cold sweat covered every part of my body, in spite of my determination to defend myself to the last. Her task finished, she walked to her reeling sons, and said: 'There, that'll soon settle him! Boys, kill yon —— ——, and then for the watch.' I turned, cocked my gun-locks silently, touched my faithful companion, and lay ready to start up and shoot the first who might attempt my life. The moment was fast approaching, and that night might have been my last in this world, had not Providence made preparations for my rescue. All was ready. The infernal hag was advancing slowly, probably contemplating the best way of despatching me, whilst her sons should be engaged with the Indian. I was several times on the eve of rising and shooting her on the spot; but she was not to be punished thus. The door was suddenly opened, and there entered two stout travellers, each with a long rifle on his shoulder. I bounced up on my feet, and making them most heartily welcome, told them how well it was for me that they should have arrived at that moment. The tale was told in a minute. The drunken sons were secured, and the woman, in spite of her defense and vociferations, shared the same fate. The Indian fairly danced with joy, and gave us to understand that . . . he would watch over us. You may suppose

we slept much less than we talked. The two strangers gave me an account of their once having been themselves in a somewhat similar situation. Day came, fair and rosy, and with it the punishment of our captives. They were now quite sobered. Their feet were unbound, but their arms were still securely tied. We marched them into the woods off the road, and having used them as Regulators were wont to use such delinquents, we set fire to the cabin, gave all the skins and implements to the young Indian warrior, and proceeded, well pleased, toward the settlements."

Whether the woman and her two sons were shot—a punishment not infrequently inflicted upon lawless and dangerous characters in the early days along the frontier, or merely whipped and warned to leave the locality, Audubon does not state. At all events he proceeded on his way without further encounters and soon rejoined his wife and child in Henderson; completely happy, for the time being, and without the slightest notion that he was on the threshold of a long stretch of the most disheartening and demoralizing experiences.

CHAPTER VI

THE LURE OF THE WOODS

I

THE most dominating factor in shaping John James Audubon's career was his insatiable love of the woods. From childhood on to the end of his days, the quiet, the beauty and the wonders of the "forest primeval" exercised an irresistible influence over him. Like the earliest of the Western pioneers—"those grim, silent, and fearless" men who preceded the "rolling tide of migration that swept across the mountains and down the valleys,"[1] Audubon "loved the pathless forest, dense and solitary, carpeted by the fallen leaves of a thousand years and fretted by the sunlight that poured through the Gothic arches of the trees, where the wild beast slunk through the shadows, where the occasional crash of a falling branch boomed like thunder, and where the camp fire at night flared up into the darkness of knitted boughs as the flaming candles in the altar

[1] *The Rise of American Civilization.*

of a cathedral cast their rays high into the traceries of the vaulted roof."

Before *this* altar Audubon knelt in devout and reverent worship, and from the glories and the wonders of *this* cathedral he drew his most exalted inspirations.

"Both his paintings and his words," declares Dr. Frank M. Chapman, "reflect the emotions of a temperament keenly responsive to the beauties of nature, and above all, to the mysterious charm of birds."

2

As a child it was the lure of the woods that drew young Audubon away from his studies and disrupted the plans his father had made for his education and life's work. Later, as a man, when faced with all the responsibilities of married life and conscious as he must have been of the economic burdens resting on his shoulders, he still seemed utterly incapable of resisting the haunting "call of the wild" which in veriest truth became the Lorelie that lured him away from every business enterprise he engaged in and eventually led him on to his complete financial and commercial undoing. In Louisville, for example, instead of "stick-

ing behind the counter"—where he belonged, and "attending strictly to business"—as he had every rational reason for doing, Audubon deliberately, though not intentionally, neglected his business and spent the major part of his time wandering through the woods, revelling in the primitive grandeur of the Kentucky forests and searching for new birds to add to his already large collection of drawings—at which time, incidentally, he had no definite plan for doing anything with his bird pictures other than making more of them at every possible opportunity.

"I shot, I drew, I looked on nature only," he wrote. "My days were happy beyond human conception, and beyond this I really cared not. Victor was born June 12, 1809, at Gwathway's Hotel of the Indian Queen. We had by this time formed the acquaintance of many persons in and about Louisville; the country was settled by planters and farmers of the most benevolent and hospitable nature; and my young wife, who possessed talents far above par, was regarded as a gem, and received by them all with the greatest pleasure. All the sportsmen and hunters were fond of me, and I became their companion; my fondness for fine horses was well kept up, and I had as good as the country—and the

country was Kentucky—could afford. Our most intimate friends were the Tarascons and the Berthouds, at Louisville and Shippingport. The simplicity and wholeheartedness of those days I cannot describe; man was man, and each, one to another, a brother. I seldom passed a day without drawing a bird, or noting something respecting its habits, Rozier meantime attending the counter. . . . I could not bear to give the attention required by my business and therefore, my business abandoned me. Indeed I never thought of it beyond the ever-engaging journeys which I was in the habit of taking to Philadelphia and New York to purchase goods; these journeys I greatly enjoyed as they afforded me ample means to study birds and their habits as I travelled through the beautiful, the darling forests of Ohio, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. Were I . . . to tell you that once, when travelling, and driving several horses before me laden with goods and dollars, I lost sight of the pack-saddles and the cash they bore, to watch the motions of a warbler, I should only repeat occurrences that happened a hundred times and more in those days. . . . For a period of twenty years I tried various branches of commerce, but they all proved unprofitable, doubtless because my whole mind was

ever filled with my passion for rambling and admiring those objects of Nature from which alone I received the purest gratification."

3

It would of course be easy to say that John James Audubon, with his youthful inaptitude for "making a living" and his generally impractical attitude toward the so-called sterner realities of life, should never have married and taken upon his shoulders the consequent responsibility of providing for a family. And it would be still easier, perhaps, to say that, having married, and having engaged in business, he had neither a legal nor a moral right to neglect that business and thrust upon the shoulders of his partner virtually all the responsibility of taking care of the business, while he went serenely and unconcernedly off with a tribe of half civilized Indians on a gunning expedition for wild swans!

But the folly of such reasoning is that it neither explains nor answers anything, and serves but to confound the reasoner. For Audubon was not—as might be assumed from a superficial examination of his con-

duct, completely devoid of any sense of the responsibilities of married life; nor was he lacking in due appreciation of the obligations of a business man. Indeed there is ample evidence to prove that his uncontrollable disinclination to apply himself to his mercantile interests and his consequent frequent inability to provide for his family caused him much genuine concern and suffering. But he just happened to be one of those human beings—cursed or blessed, as you will—whose instinctive interests and emotional desires so completely dominate them that, well aware as they are of the traditional and conventional obligations of society, and as earnestly and conscientiously as they may aim to meet those obligations, they are nevertheless swept along through life doing exactly what those innate forces compel them to do, regardless of what the World says they ought or ought not do. Oftener than not they do exactly what the World says they should not do, and woe betide them if they miss their goal even by so little as the breadth of a hair. But, if the Fates have decreed it, and fortuitous circumstances favor them, they achieve the Impossible, and the World—forgetting all that it tried to do to them, acclaims them as Heroes and Geniuses!

4

"The most beautiful things in the world," said Ernest Renan, "are done in a state of fever: every great creation involves a breach of equilibrium, a violent state of the being which draws it forth."

In the eyes of his contemporary world—save only in the heart and soul of Lucy Audubon—John James Audubon lived in a continuous "breach of equilibrium." Driven on by the sheer force of his instinctive interests and the complete dominance of his emotional desires he succumbed completely to the lure of the woods, "and above all, to the mysterious charm of birds"; fell far short of being the husband that that contemporary world thought he ought to be, frittered away his time and money, and failed miserably in all his commercial and mercantile undertakings. Yet in the end it was this very fascination that the woods exercised over Audubon that made possible his magnificent gift and service to mankind.

CHAPTER VII

RAFINESQUE, THE BATS AND THE CREMONA

I

BUT Audubon's years along the Ohio—troublous and perplexing though they were in the main, were by no means entirely lacking in those lighter experiences that often play such a vital part in making bearable an otherwise intolerable existence. He danced at parties, joined his neighbors in coon hunts, and occasionally participated in the festivities of a Kentucky barbecue. And, blessed as he was with a sense of humor which never completely deserted him no matter how far he wandered into the "slough of Despond" or how deeply he drank of the cup of discouragement, he was able to extract from those experiences a good deal of fun and entertainment.

Probably the most amusing of all those early experiences was furnished by Constantine Samuel Rafinesque —that eccentric but none the less extraordinary genius

who anticipated by many years some of Darwin's profoundest pronouncements concerning the origins of species, and who once wrote: "It is a positive fact that in knowledge I have been a botanist, naturalist, geologist, geographer, historian, poet, philosopher, philologist, economist, philanthropist"; and that by profession he had been a traveller, a merchant, manufacturer, brewer, improver, teacher, surveyor, draftsman, architect, engineer, pulmist, author, editor, bookseller, librarian, secretary!

"I am satisfied that Rafinesque was a better man than he appeared," Louis Agassis once declared,[1] adding, however, that "his misfortune was his prurient desire for novelties and his rashness in publishing them"—a commentary that is especially illuminating in connection with the famous Audubon-Rafinesque controversy.

Rafinesque called on Audubon in Henderson in the summer of 1818, and as a climax to his visit—in the course of which Rafinesque smashed Audubon's prized Cremona violin to smithereens in a wild and frenzied attempt to obtain a specimen of what Rafinesque thought was a rare species of bat, Audubon played a "practical joke" on his guest that, unfortunately, went much further than Audubon anticipated. In the course of time

[1] As quoted by Dr. David Starr Jordan.

the "joke" became one of the most puzzling mysteries in the world of natural science.

2

When Rafinesque arrived at Henderson he bore a note of introduction given to him by one of Audubon's friends whom Rafinesque had evidently met on his journey down the Ohio. This note simply read: "My dear Audubon, I send you an odd fish, which may prove to be undescribed, and hope you will do so in your next letter. Believe me always your friend, B." And according to Audubon, Rafinesque—or "M. de T," which was the pseudonym that Audubon gave his visitor in his published account of the meeting [1]—certainly did not belie the characterization, either in appearance or conduct.

"A long loose coat of yellow nankeen, much the worse for the many rubs it had got in its time, and stained all over with the juice of plants, hung loosely about him like a sac," reads Audubon's description of his visitor. "A waistcoat of the same, with enormous pockets, and buttoned up to his chin, reached below

[1] *The Eccentric Naturalist.*

over a pair of tight pantaloons, the lower parts of which were buttoned down to the ankles. His beard was as long as I have known my own to be during some of my peregrinations, and his lank black hair hung loosely over his shoulders."

His luggage, which, peddler-like, he carried on his back and which Audubon first thought was a bundle of dried clover, consisted of innumerable botanical specimens that he had gathered, his journal—"rendered water proof by means of a leather case"—and a small parcel of linen. And in all probability he carried an umbrella, for he once declared that he always took one with him wherever he went.

No wonder that Audubon—not such an un-odd fish himself, incidentally—exclaimed, when he observed Rafinesque landing from a boat: "What an odd looking fellow! how the boatmen stare at him! Sure he must be an original!" Many years afterward, Audubon, wearing a wolfskin coat, his hair falling in ringlets to his shoulder, and carrying one of his enormous portfolios, proved to be as much of a curiosity to the people of Edinburgh as Rafinesque did that summer afternoon to Audubon and the Ohio river boatmen.

"At table, however," Audubon continued, "his agreeable conversation made us all forget his singular ap-

pearance. . . . His words impressed an assurance of rigid truth, and as he directed the conversation to the study of the natural sciences I listened to him with as much delight as Telemachus could have listened to Mentor. He had come to visit me, he said, expressly for the purpose of seeing my drawings, having been told that my representations of birds were accompanied with those of shrubs and plants, and he was desirous of knowing whether I might chance to have in my collection any with which he was unacquainted."

So the bird pictures were produced and Rafinesque began looking over them. Presently he came to the drawing of a plant that was quite new to him, and after inspecting it closely, shook his head and declared that no such plant existed in Nature. Audubon insisted that it was quite common in the neighborhood. Rafinesque suggested that they leave the house immediately and go in search of the plant.

"We did so," says Audubon, "and on reaching the bank of the river I pointed to the plant. M. de T., I thought, had gone mad. He plucked the plants one after another, danced, hugged me in his arms, and exultingly told me that he had got not merely a new species, but a new genus."

Curiously enough Audubon, according to his own

admission, must have "carried on" in much the same "mad" fashion himself some years later when for the first time he observed what was then to him a new bird—a yellow-headed Troupial. Writing in his journal of his trip up the Missouri River he says: "The Captain thought me probably crazy, as I thought Rafinesque when he was at Henderson; for I suddenly started, shot at the bird and killed it."

But Rafinesque's excitement over the newly discovered plant was only the beginning of his Henderson adventures.

"We had all retired to rest," reads Audubon's account of Rafinesque's encounter with the bats. "Every person I imagined was in deep slumber save myself, when of a sudden I heard a great uproar in the naturalist's room. I got up, reached the place in a few moments, and opened the door, when to my astonishment, I saw my guest running about the room naked, holding the handle of my favorite violin, the body of which he had battered to pieces against the walls in attempting to kill the bats which entered by the open window, probably attracted by the insects flying around his candle. I stood amazed, but he continued jumping and running round and round, until he was fairly exhausted, when he begged me to procure one of the

animals for him, as he felt convinced they belonged to a 'new species.' Although I was convinced of the contrary I took up the bow of my demolished Cremona, and administering a smart tap to each of the bats as it came up, soon got specimens enough. The war ended, I again bade him good night, but could not help observing the state of the room. It was strewed with plants, which it would seem he had arranged into groups, but which were now scattered about in confusion. 'Never mind, Mr. Audubon,' quoth the eccentric naturalist, 'never mind, I'll soon arrange them again. I have the bats, and that's enough.' "

When he had collected all the plants, shells, bats and fishes that he wanted, Rafinesque suddenly disappeared.

"We were perfectly reconciled to his oddities," wrote Audubon, "and finding him a most agreeable and intelligent companion, hoped that his sojourn might be of long duration. But, one evening when tea was prepared, and we expected him to join the family, he was nowhere to be found. His grasses and other valuables were all removed from his room. The night was spent in searching for him in the neighborhood. No eccentric naturalist could be discovered. Whether he had perished in a swamp, or had been devoured by a Bear or a Gar-fish, or had taken to his heels, were matters of

conjecture; nor was it until some weeks after that a letter from him, thanking us for our attention, assured me of his safety."

But some time before Rafinesque's departure, Audubon, amused, as he must have been by his guest's mania for new and unusual species and unable to restrain his own mischievous sense of humor, concocted and executed his now notorious practical joke. Naturally he did not include the "joke" in his account of Rafinesque's visit.

"Audubon was a great artist and his paintings of birds and flowers excited the wonder and admiration of Rafinesque as they have that of generations since his time," wrote Dr. David Starr Jordan [1] when he exposed this famous hoax many years after the deaths of both Audubon and Rafinesque. "But Audubon was something of a wag withal, and some spirit of mischief led him to revenge the loss of his violin on the too ready credulity of his guest. He showed him gravely some ten grotesque drawings of impossible fishes which he had observed 'down the river' with notes on their habits, and a list of the names by which they were known by the French and English settlers. These Rafinesque duly copied into his note books, and later

[1] *Popular Science Monthly*, 1886, and *Pioneers of Science in America*.

published descriptions of them as representatives of a new genera, such as Pogostoma, Aplocentrus, Litholepis, Pilodictic, Pomacampis and the like. These singular genera, so like and yet so unlike anything yet known, have been a standing puzzle to students of fishes. Various attempts at identification of them have been made, but in no case have satisfactory results been reached. Many of the hard things which have been said of Rafinesque's work rest on these unlucky genera 'communicated to me by Mr. Audubon.' . . . The true story of his practical joke was told me by the venerable Dr. Kirtland, who in turn received it from Dr. Bachman. . . ."

By a curious coincidence Audubon was himself in later years the temporary victim of a similar "joke" at the hands of his friend John G. Bell, the celebrated taxidermist. Bell made up a bird with the head of a snipe, the body of another bird, and the wings and legs of still another, and presented it to Audubon as a "new species," explaining that he had mounted it because the bird was in very bad condition when he got it. Audubon, says Charles Frederick Holder [1] who got the story directly from Bell, "was completely mystified and proportionately delighted. He described the new bird and

[1] *Leading American Men of Science.*

sent the account to Europe, and it was weeks before Bell, then a young man, had the temerity to confess. When he did Audubon fell into a rage, but finally laughed and acknowledged the cleverness of his assistant."

3

Obviously—that is, in the light of all that happened in after years, Audubon should never have played such a potentially dangerous "joke" on any one, least of all the brilliant but credulous Rafinesque; and it might have been just as well if he had never published his sketch *The Eccentric Naturalist.* But the "light" of all that happens in "after years" is a "light that failed" wiser men than Audubon long before Audubon was born, and will probably continue to function in that same arbitrary and rather unsatisfactory manner for a good many generations yet to come.

Under these circumstances, therefore, it seems but fair to remember that at the time of Rafinesque's visit, Audubon was *not* John James Audubon the world-famous naturalist, artist and ornithologist—not even in his own projected imagination; but just plain John J.

Audubon—still a would-be merchant, and still puttering along in an aimless fashion in one or another of his various unsuccessful business enterprises, spending most of his time wandering through the woods or drawing pictures, and generally regarded by his neighbors and fellow townsmen as pretty much of a ne'er-do-well; talented, and likable enough, but destined never to get anywhere or accomplish anything. Moreover, there is no evidence that Audubon knew that there was such a human being as Constantine Samuel Rafinesque up to the very moment that that singular individual stepped ashore at Henderson, and the probabilities are that he never heard of him again until after he had published his account of Rafinesque's visit.

On the other hand, Rafinesque's conduct during his stay in Henderson would certainly have stirred the risibilities of almost any person with whom he had come in contact. And under these conditions it would have been strange indeed if Audubon—harassed and worried as he was so much of the time by matters in which he had absolutely no interest but which circumstances had forced upon him, and yet possessing the keen sense of humor that he did, had not seized upon Rafinesque and extracted from him some of that fun and amusement of which he was so sorely in need.

CHAPTER VIII

FAILURE, BANKRUPTCY AND JAIL

I

AUDUBON'S first business venture after the dissolution of his partnership with Ferdinand Rozier and his return to Henderson in the spring of 1811, was another partnership—this time with his wife's brother, Thomas W. Bakewell. They established a commission business to deal in pork, lard and flour, with headquarters in New Orleans, and into this enterprise Audubon says that he put all the money he had and practically all he could raise, but that instead of attending to his end of the business—he does not state just what his duties were supposed to be—he spent most of his time, as usual, hunting in the Kentucky woods and adding to his collection of bird pictures. In the meantime, Bakewell, who was in charge of the business in New Orleans, was struggling vainly against an insurmountable obstacle—the oncoming War of 1812, which, although it ultimately played a big part in clearing the way for

the Middle West's subsequent development and prosperity, left in its immediate wake a long trail of business disasters. The Audubon-Bakewell crash came soon after hostilities began early in the summer of 1812. On his way north, Bakewell stopped at Henderson, reported to Audubon that they had lost everything and proceeded on his way to Philadelphia.

However, before many months had passed, Audubon managed in some way to accumulate a few hundred dollars which he took to Louisville, where he purchased a small stock of merchandise; returned to Henderson and opened a general store. On the journey back to Henderson he met an adventurer-revolutionist who styled himself "General Toledo" and who said that he was on his way to South America, and endeavored to enlist the young would-be merchant in his army.

"As our flatboats were floating one clear moonshiny night lashed together," wrote Audubon, "this individual opened his views to me, promising me wonders of wealth should I decide to accompany him, and he went so far as to offer me a colonelcy on what he was pleased to call his 'Safe Guard.' I listened, it is true, but looked more at the heavens than on his face, and in the former found so much more of peace than of war that I concluded not to accompany him."

But despite his refusal to join the "army" Audubon evidently made a very favorable impression upon the General, for when they separated at Henderson the General presented him with a finely wrought Spanish dagger, which, it is not unlikely, was the identical weapon with which Audubon saved his own life a few years later when he was attacked by a business enemy and murderously assaulted.

The Audubon general store—which occupied a small, one story log cabin, apparently did a good business in spite of its proprietor, who according to local tradition, spent most of his time in the woods and very little of it back of the counter. Not infrequently he remained away from Henderson for months at a stretch. On one occasion he is said to have followed a particular species of hawk that he was especially anxious to study and picture, for three whole days. Another time while in pursuit of a flicker which he saw enter a hole in an old tree, he climbed the tree, ran his hand in the hole, pulled out a snake instead of the bird, and in his excitement fell to the ground. There is no definite record as to who looked after the customers during Audubon's absences but the probabilities are that it was Mrs. Audubon, and it is also more than likely that it was she who really made a "go" of the business.

For several years the family lived in comparative comfort. Their needs were few and simple, they had many good friends, and they rejoiced in the birth of their second son, John Woodhouse Audubon, on November 30, 1812. With some of the profits from the store Audubon purchased several acres of land, which included a small house or two and an excellent orchard. A vegetable garden was planted. Wild game was plentiful in the surrounding woods, and in a pond near his home Audubon raised turtles which provided him with an ample supply of his favorite soup. Time passed, savings accumulated, and it began to look as though the Audubons had finally settled down and were going to make Henderson their permanent home.

2

But the peace and pleasure of those log-cabin days in Henderson were only the proverbial calm that preceded the stormiest and most distressing period in Audubon's life. Thomas Bakewell again appeared on the scene and, with the best intentions, persuaded Audubon to join him in still another partnership. They leased a tract of land along the water front for a term of 99

years, for the use of which they agreed to pay $20 a year. Thomas Pears, a young Englishman who had worked with Audubon in William Bakewell's office in New York, joined the partnership, and the trio erected on the newly leased land what Audubon in later years always referred to either as "that infernal mill" or "that accursed mill." It was a steam saw and grist mill, built at a cost of about $15,000—a considerable sum in those pioneer days in the Middle West—and for a short while the three partners were certain that it was going to make all of them rich. But they were all sadly mistaken, for the very logical reason that there was so little grain grown around Henderson at that time, and so little lumbering done in the neighborhood that the mill simply could not operate at a profit over any extended period. Also, it may be fairly assumed that Audubon did not become so deeply engrossed in the mill—certainly not while he had two able bodied partners to help him—that he neglected his other interests!

Pears soon became discouraged and quit, and Bakewell and Audubon took over his interest in the project. Later Bakewell withdrew. For a while Audubon undertook to run the mill himself. Then he persuaded various other men to join him in the enterprise. But it made no difference what he did or which way he turned—

misfortune and mishap were always right at his heels. A band of wood cutters that he had hired to fell trees for his mill, stole his team of oxen and other valuables and fled down the Ohio on a flatboat.

"The new-born Kentucky banks nearly all broke in quick succession," he wrote, "and again we started with a new set of partners. . . . Matters, however, grew worse every day; the times were what men called 'bad,' but I am fully persuaded the great fault was ours, and the building of that accursed steam-mill was, of all the follies of man, one of the greatest. . . . How I labored at that infernal mill! from dawn to dark, nay at times all night."

Normally a peaceful and peace-loving man, but harassed and irritated by the trials and tribulations of his business difficulties, Audubon became involved in law suits, quarrels and personal encounters. In one instance he was sued for $10,000 by a group of Henderson business men to whom he had sold a steamboat, and who alleged that after they made the purchase, Audubon maliciously took out an attachment upon the craft. In turn Audubon insisted that the bills with which his fellow townsmen paid him for the boat were worthless and that he only sought to recover what was still rightly his property. The plaintiffs declared that

Audubon was preparing to leave Kentucky and he was promptly arrested and held in $10,000 bail to guarantee his appearance in court. But when the case was finally called for trial the plaintiffs failed to appear to prosecute their charges and Audubon was dismissed. As a sequel to the suit one of the plaintiffs attacked Audubon on the street in Henderson and began beating him with a club. Audubon, however, was not entirely unprepared for the attack. Friends had warned him that the man had threatened to kill him, and at his wife's urging he had armed himself with a dagger. After his assailant had struck him several times, Audubon, whose right hand was in a sling as the result of an accident in his mill, succeeded in drawing his dagger with his left hand and stabbed the man, inflicting serious but not fatal wounds.

In his own account of the affair Audubon did not give his assailant's name, referring to him, in one instance, as "S—— B——," and in another as "T—— B——." But the latter initials were apparently a slip on Audubon's part—either intentional or accidental, for among the men who bought his boat there was none whose initials were "T.B." But, one of the men was named "Samuel Bowen" and various historians have identified him as Audubon's assailant, one in partic-

ular [1] having recorded that Bowen's friends were immediately up in arms and hunted Audubon with guns, adding: "A few of his (Audubon's) friends gathered about him and by the joint effect of a show of arms and moral suasion, were able to prevent further violence. When the excitement was sufficiently allayed to permit of his doing so, Audubon walked into the court house, where Judge Broadnax was holding court, and some sort of formal proceeding was had, resulting in the discharge of the defendant. The tradition is well established in Henderson that, after the proceeding was disposed of, Judge Broadnax stepped gravely down from the bench, approached the man who had recently stood under the charge of maliciously stabbing with intent to kill, and said, 'Mr. Audubon, you committed a serious offense—an exceedingly serious offense, sir,—in failing to kill the d—— rascal.'"

But vindicated though he was in both of these affairs, Audubon's trials and tribulations only continued to pile up and vex him, and well could he write, "misfortune after misfortune came down upon us like so many avalanches, both fearful and destructive." Pecuniary difficulties increased daily. Everything he owned

[1] Dixon L. Merritt in "Audubon, the Ornothologist, in Kentucky." *The Taylor-Trotwood Magazine*, Vol. 10 (1909). Pages 293–298.

that had any value whatever—property and virtually all his personal possessions—was either transferred to creditors or converted into cash and the money used to pay bills. Finally, shorn of all his worldly goods, and still facing debts that he could neither meet nor take up, he was arrested, locked up in the Louisville jail, and released by the court only after he had frankly admitted that he was absolutely bankrupt.

3

But bitter and disheartening though these experiences were at the time, the fact that his eight years of final effort in Henderson to establish himself as a business man came to a climax in his complete failure, was really the most fortunate thing that could possibly have happened to Audubon. For until the whole structure of what he believed was his Duty had collapsed and virtually buried him in the ruins, he saw no connection whatever between his native talent and his steadily growing skill and knowledge as an artist and naturalist, and, the one sphere of work and achievement for which he was preeminently qualified. And so obsessed was he with the necessity of earning a living and providing

for the financial needs of his family—in spite of his paradoxical disinclination to tie himself down to any of his business enterprises—and so strong was the spirit of determination within him, that anything short of utter disaster would necessarily have encouraged him to keep on with his commercial activities. Success would have shunted him irretrievably off his course, and with the prosperity that would surely have come to him with the passing years, he would have gone on to the end of his days—as many another *successful* man has done, outwardly comfortable and apparently wanting nothing, but secretly unhappy and thoroughly dissatisfied with himself; and the news of his death in his local newspaper would have been the last that the world was ever to hear of John James Audubon. But as Fate would have it, Henderson marked not the end but the real beginning of Audubon's career.

CHAPTER IX

THE ITINERANT PORTRAIT ARTIST

I

THE day Tom Lincoln's boy Abe was ten years old—that is, on February 12, 1819, a small advertisement appeared in one of the Louisville newspapers announcing that a portrait artist had lately arrived in town and was now open for engagements. Prospective patrons were assured that all portraits would be "strong likenesses" and that the charges would be very reasonable—only $5 per picture. And by way of demonstrating the quality of his merchandise, the artist drew a few portraits gratis and presented them to the subjects. The latter, pleased with their pictures, promptly exhibited them to their friends and soon the artist had an abundance of work.

Thus John James Audubon found in a single magic package the three things that he most needed at this particular time: the stepping stone that enabled him to climb quickly out of the all but submerging mire of his

recent commercial disasters; a perpetual "meal ticket" —to use a homely but expressive later-day colloquialism, that was to serve him and his family for as long as he cared to use it, and, most important of all, the first glimmering of a realization that it might be possible for him to earn a living by using the talents with which nature had endowed him.

2

Audubon's decision to try his hand as a portrait artist —though it subsequently proved to be not only the gateway to one of his most unique experiences but the real turning point in his life, was, at the time it was made, nothing but a last desperate effort to save himself and his family from starving. For twelve years he had striven as best one of his disposition could to establish himself as a business man and provide for his family. But disaster and discouragement had confronted him at every turn in the road, and now at the age of thirty-four and with a wife and two small children dependent on him, and without a dollar to his name, he was forced by sheer necessity to turn to his own natural talents and apply them in the only way that

seemed to offer any money-making possibilities whatever. From time to time he had made a few rough sketches of his wife and of some of his Indian friends, and the results had been fairly satisfactory. But he was far from confident that total strangers would like his work or be willing to pay him to make their portraits, and it was "with that heaviest of burdens, a heavy heart" that he finally left Henderson—his portfolio of precious but seemingly worthless bird pictures under his left arm, and his rifle across his right shoulder, and turned his face toward Louisville.

"This," as he afterwards wrote, "was the saddest of all my journeys—the only time in my life when the wild turkey that so often crossed my path and the thousands of lesser birds that enlivened the woods and the prairies, all looked like enemies, and I turned my eyes from them, as if I could have wished that they had never existed."

But Fate was kind to Audubon even if the World had not been, and besides, he was a much better portrait artist than he suspected. Moreover, those were the hey-days of the itinerant portrait artist, for there were no cameras—even the Daguerreotype was still twenty years below the Horizon when Audubon trudged his melancholy way along the banks of the Ohio enroute

from Henderson to Louisville—and only the wealthiest of the early Americans could afford the services of the few native portrait painters of recognized ability, most of whom lived in Philadelphia and New York and rarely visited any of the communities west of the Allegheny Mountains. And Louisville, with its population of 4500 and growing rapidly, seemed to be made to Audubon's order.

"In the course of a few weeks," reads Audubon's account of his debut as a portrait artist, "I had as much work to do as I could possibly wish, so much that I was able to rent a house in a retired part of Louisville. I was sent for four miles in the country, to take likenesses of persons on their death-beds, and so high did my reputation suddenly rise, as the best delineator of heads in that vicinity, that a clergyman residing at Louisville (I would give much now to recall and write down his name) had his dead child disinterred, to procure a facsimile of his face, which, by the way, I gave the parents as if alive, to their intense satisfaction."

On another occasion—and while he was still living in Louisville, Audubon was awakened one night by sharp and insistent knocking on his front door. Investigating he learned that the call came from a farmer who had driven into town, hunted up Audubon's home,

and now begged the artist to return with him to his farm house and make a portrait of his mother who was dying. Audubon dressed as quickly as he could, gathered up his drawing crayons and a few sheets of paper, and climbing into the farmer's wagon drove off with him. The man's mother was still alive when they reached the farm house, and with a single flickering candle for illumination, Audubon made the much desired portrait.

3

During the next seven years—years that although they saw him definitely on his Road to Destiny, were in some respects the most distressing that he was ever to experience—portrait work proved to be Audubon's one sure bulwark against not only the direst want but at times actual starvation. In Natchez, Mississippi, he found himself badly in need of shoes and so poor that he could neither afford to have his old shoes repaired or buy a new pair. So he walked around the town until he found a shoemaker's shop, offered to make a portrait of the cobbler and his wife, and in this way obtained new shoes for himself and for a companion who was similarly distressed and equally "hard

up." Stranded at Meadville, in the northwestern part of Pennsylvania, with only a dollar and a half between them and more than a thousand miles from their homes, Audubon and another companion—also an artist—were forced to solicit portrait work along the street to pay for their food and lodging and provide the necessary funds to continue their journey. In his account of this Meadville episode—an experience, incidentally, that was thoroughly characteristic of the man and his mode of life at this stage in his career, Audubon wrote:

"We put our baggage and ourselves under the roof of a tavern keeper known by the name of J. E. Smith, at the sign of the Traveller's Rest, and soon after took a walk to survey the little village that was to be laid under contribution for our further support. . . . I had opened the case that contained my drawings, and putting my portfolio under my arm, and a few good credentials in my pocket, walked up Main Street, looking to the right and left, examining the different heads which occurred, until I fixed my eyes on a gentleman in a store who looked as though he might want a sketch. I begged him to allow me to sit down. This granted, I remained purposely silent until he very soon asked me what was 'in that portfolio.' These three words sounded well, and without waiting another instant, I

opened it to his view. This was a Hollander, who complimented me much on the execution of the drawings of birds and flowers in my portfolio. Showing him a sketch of the best friend I have in the world at present, I asked him if he would like one in the same style of himself. He not only answered in the affirmative but assured me that he would exert himself in procuring as many more customers as he could. I thanked him . . . and having fixed upon the next morning for drawing the sketch, I returned to the Traveller's Rest, with the hope that tomorrow might prove propitious. Supper was ready, and as in America we generally have but one sort of table d'hote, we sat down, when, every individual looking upon me as a missionary priest, on account of my hair, which in those days flowed loosely on my shoulders, I was asked to say grace, which I did with a fervent spirit."

The next morning Audubon returned to the Hollander's store and at the latter's invitation set up an impromptu studio, the narrative continuing: "See me ascending a crazy flight of steps, from the back part of a store-room into a large garret extending over the store and counting room, and mark me looking around to see how the light could be stopped from obtruding on me through no less than four windows facing each

other at right-angles. Then follow me scrutinizing the corners and finding in one a cat nursing her young among a heap of rags intended for the paper mill. Two hogsheads filled with oats, a parcel of Dutch toys carelessly thrown on the floor, a large drum and a bassoon in another part, fur caps hanging along the wall, and the portable bed of the merchant's clerk swinging like a hammock near the center, together with some rolls of sole leather, made up the picture. I saw all this at a glance, and closing the extra windows with blankets, I soon procured a painter's light. A young gentleman sat to try my skill. I finished his phiz, which was approved of. The merchant then took the chair, and I had the good fortune to please him also. The room became crowded with the gentry of the village. Some laughed, while others expressed their wonder; but my work went on, notwithstanding the observations which were made. My sitter invited me to spend the evening with him, which I did, and joined him in some music on the flute and violin. I returned to my companion with great pleasure, and you may judge how much that pleasure was increased, when I found that he also had made two sketches. Having written a page or two in our journals, we retired for rest. The following day was spent much in the same manner. I felt highly gratified that from

under my gray coat my talents had made their way, and I was pleased to discover that industry and moderate abilities prove at least as valuable as first-rate talents without the former of these qualities. We left Meadville on foot, having forwarded our baggage by wagon. Our hearts were light, our pockets replenished, and we walked in two days to Pittsburgh, as happy as circumstances permitted us to be."

On one occasion when he had made a trip up the Mississippi from New Orleans to Natchez, and, as was usually the case in those days, found that his purse fell far short of his needs, Audubon persuaded the steamboat captain to permit him to pay for his passage by making portraits of the captain and his wife and presenting them with the pictures. On this same trip he also made portraits of several of his fellow passengers which brought him in some actual cash. In New Orleans, after wandering about the streets of the city for days in a vain search for work and with so little money in his pocket that he could not even afford to pay for a night's lodging, Audubon's skill as a portrait artist again came to his rescue, for he finally succeeded, as he wrote in his journal, "in making a hit with a portrait of a well known citizen," and this picture, exhibited to the public, soon brought him orders for several more.

AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF AUDUBON'S PORTRAIT WORK

His quaint study of Anna Cora Mowatt, one of the most popular of the early American dramatists and actresses, whose celebrated comedy "Fashion" created almost as much of a sensation when it was revived a few years ago as when it was originally produced in 1845. Reproduced through the courtesy of the owner, Thomas B. Clarke, Esq.

All of Audubon's early portraits were done in crayon, chalk, charcoal or pencil, because it wasn't until he reached New Orleans early in 1821 and became acquainted with a number of more experienced artists who were then living in New Orleans—including John Vanderlyn, later noted for his historical paintings—that he began experimenting with oils. A fellow itinerant named George Stein, whose home was in Washington, Pennsylvania, and whom he met in Natchez, gave Audubon his first lessons in the use of oils, and some years later when he visited Philadelphia, he received much helpful instruction and criticism from the celebrated portrait artist, Thomas Sully, who subsequently became one of his staunchest friends.

In the course of his years of wanderings Audubon doubtless made and sold hundreds of portraits, for he was in straitened financial circumstances almost continuously throughout that entire period, and portrait work was the only sure way he had of earning money; also, he was an unusually rapid worker. But most of these pictures have long since disappeared—gone, probably, the way of so many other "old-fashioned" family relics and heirlooms. Fortunately, though, enough of them have been preserved—notably his portrait of Henry Clay and his quaint portrayal of Anna

Cora Mowatt, the actress, which are now a part of the valuable Thomas B. Clarke Collection of early American portraits and occupy a place of honor in the Philadelphia Art Museum—to prove that had he been a mind to, Audubon might easily have won his way into the ranks of the most distinguished portrait painters of his time.

CHAPTER X

THE BEGINNING OF AN ASTOUNDING ACHIEVEMENT

I

BUT Audubon never regarded portrait work as anything but the veriest stop-gap—a quick and sure means of providing food, clothes and shelter for himself and his family, and was always more than ready to quit it as soon as it had served his most immediate needs. He left Louisville just when he was beginning to enjoy what was for him a comparatively lucrative income and moved up the Ohio to Cincinnati where through the influence of friends he had secured a position as taxidermist in a newly organized museum of natural history. But in six months he had finished all the work he could do for the museum and a dispute having arisen over the payment of his salary, he was again compelled to resort to portrait work. A few pupils in drawing brought in a little more money, and what with Mrs. Audubon's frugal management and his own

skill with his rifle—for partridge, woodcock and wild turkey could then be shot within what are now the suburban districts of Cincinnati—the family drifted along through the summer and on into the autumn of 1820.

2

Up to this time—at least during the twelve years that had intervened since his marriage, Audubon had lived what virtually amounted to a dual life, for consciously he had undertaken to travel in one direction while sub-consciously he had set out on another journey that led him in a diametrically opposite direction. In other words, he had conscientiously attempted to win his way in a competitive man-made economic world, and at the same time devote the very best of his thought and energy to the study of the one thing, outside of his wife and children, in which he was genuinely and thoroughly interested—birds. Naturally he had gotten nowhere, and apparently he hadn't the slightest idea as to what was causing all his trouble until after he moved to Cincinnati; probably, not until after he had lost his position in the museum and found himself

exactly where he was when he arrived in Louisville fresh from the scenes of his Henderson disasters.

Then he began to realize how utterly incongruous his past life had been and how altogether futile it would be for him to make any further attempts to reconcile two objectives that were as far apart as the two Poles and as totally different as day is from night. Moreover, he began now, for the first time in his life, really to believe in his "own thoughts"—to believe, as Emerson later expressed it, that what was true for him in his "own private heart" must eventually be "true for all men." In brief, he began to understand, as never before, that he—John James Audubon, not only knew better than any one else what John James Audubon was best fitted to do, but, that only by doing that particular thing and doing it to the very utmost of his ability could he ever hope to achieve any really worth while goal, and so realize the only true and lasting happiness that Life has to offer.

3

"Speak your latent convictions," wrote the Sage of Concord—but how aptly the words might have come

from the pen of Audubon as he began to perceive for the first time the ray of wisdom that was to guide him in all his future undertakings, "and it shall be the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost—and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. . . . There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given him to till."

And so, clear at last in his own mind as to the course that he should hereafter pursue, and encouraged and stimulated by the faith, the fortitude, and the resourcefulness of his wife, John James Audubon faced that crisis that sooner or later confronts every ambitious man, and, with the rarest of courage, made the great decision of his life. Resolutely he turned his back on the Past, and chancing his all upon the misty uncertainties of the Future he determined that from that moment on he would devote himself—wholly and whole-heartedly, to the study and portrayal of the birds of America.

Out of that decision—born, as it was, in a veritable manger of want and suffering, grew a definite plan; and out of that plan there eventually emerged an accomplishment which the great French scientist Cuvier declared to be "the most magnificent monument which has yet been erected to ornithology" and which to this day is still regarded as an astounding achievement.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROAMER AND THE WANDERER

I

AUDUBON left Cincinnati on October 12, 1820, and started down the Ohio River on a flatboat—without a dollar in his pocket. He took with him his portfolios of bird pictures, his drawing materials, his gun, his dog "Dash," and numerous letters of introduction and recommendation—including one from Henry Clay and another from General, afterwards President, William Henry Harrison; and accompanied by a young artist named Joseph Mason who had agreed to act as his pupil-assistant, he planned to explore the Ohio, Mississippi, Red and Arkansas Rivers and the adjoining woodlands, study the birds and plants that were to be found in those parts, make at least one hundred drawings, and then rejoin his family—Mrs. Audubon having arranged to remain in Cincinnati where with the assistance of relatives and the money that she hoped to earn as a teacher, she was confident that she could

take care of herself and her two children. After drifting fourteen days Audubon and young Mason finally reached the Mississippi. Early in December they arrived in Natchez, and a month later moved on to New Orleans—then a city of nearly 50,000 inhabitants, growing rapidly as a commercial center, and in the throes of one of the most picturesque phases of its always dramatic and colorful history.

"Sometimes there would be five or six thousand up-river bargemen in town at once, wild, reckless and unemployed," wrote George W. Cable [1] of the city during this period. "On the levee especially this new tremendous life and energy heaved and palpitated. . . . There were no wharves built out into the harbor yet, and all the vast mass of produce and goods lay out under the open sky on the long, unbroken level of the curving harbor front, where Ohio bargemen, Germans, Mississippi raftsmen, Irishmen, French, English, Creoles, Yankees and negro and mulatto slaves surged and jostled and filled the air with shouts and imprecations. Vice put on the same activity that commerce showed. The Creole had never been a strong moral force. The Americans came in as to gold diggings or diamond fields, to grab and run. The transatlantic im-

[1] *The Creoles of Louisiana.*

migrant of those days was frequently the offscouring of Europe. The West Indian was a leader in licentiousness, gambling and dueling. The number of billiard rooms, gaming houses and lottery offices was immense. In the old town they seemed to be every second house. . . . The cafes of the central town were full of filibusters. . . . The paving movement had been only a flurry or two, and even in the heart of the town, where carriages sometimes sank to their axles in mud, highway robbery and murder lay always in wait for the incautious night wayfarer who ventured out alone. . . . The worst day of all the week was Sunday. The stores and shops were open, but toil slackened and license gained headway. Gambling rooms and ball rooms were full, weapons were often out, the quadroon masques of the Salle de Condé were thronged with men of high standing, and crowds of barge and raftsmen, as well as Creoles and St. Domingans, gathered at those open-air African dances, carousals, and debaucheries in the rear of the town that have left their monument in the name of Congo Square."

Amidst this turmoil Audubon and Mason maintained a precarious existence. When they were lucky enough to get an order for a portrait or two they lived in comparative comfort. Audubon noted in his journal that

near their lodgings, "on the south angle of a neighboring chimney-top, a mocking bird regularly resorts, and pleases us with the sweetest notes from the rising of the moon until about midnight, and every morning from about eight o'clock until eleven, when he flies away to the Convent gardens to feed." They continued their work of painting birds and plants, and "the time passed more pleasantly." But when the portrait business was bad—as it frequently was—they slept wherever they could find a place to lay their heads and subsisted on the smallest possible amount of food. Finally they decided to leave New Orleans, and on June 16, 1821, started up the Mississippi on the steamboat *Columbus*, headed for Shippingport, Kentucky, but abandoned their plan when the wife of a wealthy Louisiana planter whom they met on the steamer—Mrs. James Pirrie, of Bayou Sara, engaged Audubon as drawing instructor for her daughter. For this work, which took only a portion of his morning hours, Audubon received $60 a month, and in addition, he and young Mason were given their board and lodging at the Pirrie plantation, and were free to employ their spare time as they pleased. However, by the end of October Audubon and Mason left Bayou Sara and returned to New Orleans, partly because they were not inclined

to remain too long in any one locality, and partly because Audubon had been made to feel somewhat uncomfortable by what he considered the utterly groundless and rather ridiculous jealousy of a young physician who was attending his pupil in her convalescence from a recent fever, and who, although he permitted his patient to eat anything she cared to, insisted that she stop her drawing lessons for several months and take a complete rest.

2

Upon reaching New Orleans Audubon wrote in his journal: "My long flowing hair, and loose yellow nankeen dress"—not, it would seem, entirely unreminiscent of Rafinesque when he arrived at Audubon's home in Henderson some years earlier—"and the unfortunate cut of my features, attracted much attention, and made me desire to be dressed like other people as soon as possible." A week or so later he made this entry: "Rented a house in Dauphine street at seventeen dollars per month and determined to bring my family to New Orleans. Since I left Cincinnati, October 12, 1820, I have finished 62 drawings of birds and

plants, 3 quadrupeds, 2 snakes, 50 portraits of all sorts, and have subsisted by my humble talents, not having a dollar when I started. I sent a draft to my wife and began life in New Orleans with forty-two dollars, health and much anxiety to pursue my plan of collecting all the birds of America." And on November 10, he recorded: "Mr. Basterop called on me and wished me to join him in painting a panorama of the city, but my birds, my beloved birds of America, occupy all my time, and nearly all my thoughts, and I do not wish to see any other perspective than the last specimen of these drawings."

Mrs. Audubon and the two boys arrived in New Orleans early in December, and joined Audubon and young Mason in the meagrely furnished house on Dauphine street. But with the coming of spring, 1822, Audubon decided that he must be on the move again, and he and his pupil-assistant started on another journey up the Mississippi. This time they got as far as Natchez. During the summer Audubon suffered from a severe fever, and late in August young Mason decided to return north to his home. In the meanwhile the two Audubon boys had come up to Natchez because their father had an opportunity to place them in a school there, and in September Mrs. Audubon arrived.

Two months later the family was again separated when Mrs. Audubon and the boys moved down the river to the Percy plantation, near Bayou Sara, where at the invitation of Mrs. Robert Percy she opened a school for the Percy children, her own two sons and the children of several neighboring planters. Audubon remained in Natchez throughout the winter, and it was at this time that he wrote in his journal: "I had finally determined to break through all bonds and pursue my ornithological pursuits. My best friends solemnly regarded me as a madman, and my wife and family alone gave me encouragement. My wife determined that my genius should prevail, and that my final success as an ornithologist should be triumphant."

One of Mrs. Audubon's former pupils [1] left this brief but illuminating sketch of Audubon during these years of his wanderings and roamings: "He was with us eight months but during the greater part of the time was wandering all over the state (Louisiana), walking almost the entire time. No insect, worm, reptile, bird or animal escaped his notice. He would make a collection, return home and draw his crayon sketches, when his son John would stuff the birds and such animals as he wished to preserve."

[1] Mrs. E. C. Walker, *The Auk*, October 1886.

3

Early in the spring of 1823 he visited Jackson, Mississippi—a decidedly different community then from what it is today for he found the town to be "a rendezvous for gamblers and vagabonds"—and "disgusted with the place and the people" he determined to rejoin his family at the Percy plantation. In May he and his son Victor, then a stalwart lad of 14, left Bayou Sara and again journeyed up the Mississippi to Natchez. During the summer the two were stricken with a fever and Mrs. Audubon hastened to their bedsides to nurse them. By autumn they had both completely recovered and Audubon decided to take Victor to Louisville, and then go on to Philadelphia where he hoped to get work as a teacher and possibly interest some publisher in his bird pictures. Accordingly they started north again on October 3, travelled up the Mississippi on a steamboat as far as the mouth of the Ohio—where low water prevented the boat from going any further; finished their journey afoot, and arrived in Louisville on October 25.

For some reason—probably the low state of his finances—Audubon decided to remain in Louisville

throughout the winter. But early in the spring, arrangements having been made for Victor to stay with one of his relatives who had already given him employment as a clerk, Audubon resumed his journey. He arrived in Philadelphia on April 5—his long hair reaching to his shoulders, his shirt open at the neck and in every other outward detail of his appearance, a typical backwoodsman. He visited his old home at *Mill Grove,* became acquainted with most of the leading artists and scientists of the city, made a number of friends, and several acquaintances that in later years proved to be far from friendly; exhibited his bird pictures with no particular success, received no encouragement in his search for a publisher, and late in July moved on to New York. Here he met more artists and scientists; posed for the figure of Andrew Jackson—from the shoulders down—to oblige his friend Vanderlyn the artist, who was then working on a full length portrait of "Old Hickory" (the picture now hangs in New York's City Hall) but had been able to detain Jackson only long enough to complete the painting of his head; received more compliments on his work but was again disappointed and discouraged over his failure to find a publisher, and on August 15 sailed up the Hudson for Albany. From there he travelled west by canal boat

to Rochester—a six-day journey of 268 miles, for which he paid a fare of seven dollars; visited Niagara Falls, found—as he wrote in his journal—that the city of Buffalo "now has about two hundred houses, a bank, and daily mail" and "is filled with Indians, who have come here to receive their annuity from the Government"; sailed across Lake Erie to the town of Erie in Pennsylvania; moved southward via Meadville, and on September 7 arrived in Pittsburg. There he spent more than a month "scouring the country for birds" and continuing his drawing; made the acquaintance of the Rev. John H. Hopkins, whom he found to be an "amiable man," and after attending some of the dominie's ministrations, wrote in his journal: "In the course of my intimacy with the Rev. Mr. Hopkins I was brought to think more than I usually did of religious matters; but I confess I never think of churches without feeling sick at heart at the sham and show of some of their professors. To repay evils with kindness is the religion I was taught to practice, and this will forever be my rule."

Late in October he bought a skiff and in company with three other men—"an artist, a doctor and an Irishman," as he described them—started down the Ohio. The weather was cold, raw and rainy, and at night the

boat was hauled ashore and used as a sleeping shelter. At Wheeling his companions quit in disgust and Audubon sold the skiff and took passage on a keelboat for Cincinnati. A month later he arrived in Louisville where he visited his son Victor, and then proceeded on his way down the Ohio and the Mississippi to Bayou Sara, which he reached late in November—his clothes rent and wasted, his hair uncut, and altogether a rather disreputable looking figure.

"The steamer which brought me was on her way to New Orleans, and I was put ashore in a small boat about midnight, and left to grope my way on a dark, rainy and sultry night to the village, about one mile distant," reads the Wanderer's own account of his dramatic arrival at Bayou Sara and the child-like happiness that came to him early the next morning when he finally reached the Percy plantation and, after more than a year's absence, once more beheld—and held in his arms—his beloved wife. "That awful scourge the yellow fever prevailed, and was taking off the citizens with greater rapidity than had ever before been known. When I arrived, the desolation was so great that one large hotel was deserted, and I walked in, finding the doors all open, and the furniture in the house, but not a living person. The inmates had all gone to the pine

woods. I walked to the post office, roused the postmaster, and learned to my joy that my wife and son were well at Mrs. Percy's. He had no accommodation for me, but recommended me to a tavern where I might find a bed. The atmosphere was calm, heavy and suffocating, and it seemed to me as if I were breathing death while hunting for this tavern; finding it, the landlord told me he had not a spare bed, but mentioned a German at the end of the village who might take me in; I walked over there and was kindly received. The German was a man of cultivation and taste, and a lover of natural science, and had collected a variety of interesting objects. He gave me some refreshment, and offered me a horse to ride to Mrs. Percy's. The horse was soon at the door, and with many thanks I bade him adieu. My anxiety to reach my beloved wife and child was so great that I resolved to make a straight course through the woods, which I thought I knew thoroughly, and hardly caring where I should cross the bayou. In less than two hours I reached its shores, but the horse refused to enter the water, and snorting suddenly, turned and made off through the woods, as if desirous of crossing at some other place, and when he reached the shore again walked in and crossed me safely to the other side. The sky was overcast and the mosquitoes

plentiful; but I thought I recognized the spot where I had watched the habits of a wild cat, or a deer, as the clouds broke away, and the stars now and then peeped through to help me make my way through the gloomy forests. But in this I was mistaken, for when day dawned I found myself in woods which were unknown to me. However, I chanced to meet a black man, who told me where I was, and that I had passed Mrs. Percy's plantation two miles. Turning my horse's head and putting spurs to him, a brisk gallop soon brought me to the house. It was early, but I found my beloved wife up and engaged in giving a lesson to her pupils, and, holding and kissing her, I was once more happy, and all my toils and trials were forgotten."

CHAPTER XII

TOO POOR TO BUY A NOTEBOOK

I

ACROSS the path of every man who leaves the Highway of Tradition and chooses to go his own way in order that he may do those things in which he is truly interested and for which he believes that he is peculiarly equipped, strides Colossus-like a grim and exacting figure—the God of Things As They Are. And to this Deity, John James Audubon—like every other ambitious and adventuring man since the beginning of Time—paid his hostages to Fortune. For years poverty stalked his every footstep, at every opportunity lashing him with its privations, tormenting him with the sufferings that it imposed upon his family, and distracting him with the fear that he might not live to complete the great work upon which he had set his heart, and toward the furthering of which he had already made irreparable sacrifices, until—like *Henry Ryecroft,* he might well have exclaimed: "When I think of all the sorrow and barrenness that have been

wrought in my life by want of a few more pounds per annum than I was able to earn, I stand aghast at money's significance."

There were times in the course of the discouraging years that followed his departure from Henderson when Audubon was driven to live in the poorest of quarters and to sustain himself with the meagrest amount of food. There were times when he did not even dare to spend what little money he had for any kind of a lodging for fear of starving on the morrow. And there were still other times when the sorrows of life weighed so heavily on him that he was all but ready to give up the struggle.

"Ah Lucy!" he wrote after the death of one of his dearest friends, "What have I felt today! how can I bear the loss of our truest friend? This has been a sad day, most truly; I have spent it thinking, thinking, learning, weighing my thoughts, and quite sick of life. I wish I had been as quiet as my venerable friend, as she lay for the last time in her room."

2

"Two months and five days have elapsed," he wrote in his journal in New Orleans on New Year's Day,

1822, "before I could venture to dispose of one hundred and twenty-five cents to pay for this book, that probably, like all other things in the world, is ashamed to find me so poor." And a year later in Natchez—disheartened and for the time being utterly bewildered, he declared: "I thought of going to Philadelphia, and again thought of going to Louisville, and once more entering upon mercantile pursuits, but had no money to move anywhere." At Niagara Falls his funds were so low that he did not even dare to part with the small amount then asked as a toll-fare to cross the bridge to Goat Island; spent twelve cents for a bread and milk dinner, and "went to bed at night," as an entry in his journal reads, "thinking of Franklin eating his roll in the streets of Philadelphia, of Goldsmith travelling by the help of his musical powers, and of other great men who had worked their way through hardships and difficulties to fame, and fell asleep hoping, by persevering industry, to make a name for myself among my countrymen."

After a visit to the Lyceum of Natural History in New York City in 1824, he wrote: "I feel clouded and depressed. Remember that I have done nothing, and fear I may die unknown. I feel I am strange to all but the birds of America. In a few days I shall be in the

woods and quite forgotten." But both unfortunately, as well as fortunately, he was not to be forgotten, for a few months later, after an unsuccessful attempt to sell some lithographs of General Lafayette on the streets of Wheeling, West Virginia, he arrived in Cincinnati where—as he recorded: "I was beset by claims for the payment of articles which years before had been ordered for the museum, but from which I got no benefit. Without money or the means of making it, I applied to Messrs. Keating and Bell for the loan of fifteen dollars, but had not the courage to do so until I had walked past their house several times, unable to make up my mind how to ask the favor. I got the loan cheerfully and took a deck passage to Louisville. I was allowed to take my meals in the cabin, and at night slept among some shavings I managed to scrape together. The spirit of contentment which I now feel is strange—it borders on the sublime; and enthusiast or lunatic—as some of my relatives will have me—I am glad to possess such a spirit." And again in Louisville: "I discover that my friends think only of my apparel, and those upon whom I have conferred acts of kindness prefer to remind me of my errors."

Twice thieves robbed him of his purse—slim though it was, and left him penniless in strange cities. And once

even Nature itself seemed to turn its hand against him, for rats, gnawing their way into a chest in which he had stored a number of his drawings—representing several hundred birds—destroyed virtually every one of the pictures. Stunned by the discovery of his loss, he "slept not for several nights, and the days passed like days of oblivion—until," as he afterwards declared, "the animal forces being recalled into action, through the strength of my constitution," he again took up his gun, his notebook, and his pencils, and stimulated by the hope that he would now make much better drawings than before, he went forth into the woods and within three years had completely re-drawn every one of the destroyed pictures.

CHAPTER XIII

VERSATILITY THAT RIVALED FRANKLIN'S

I

IT is probably true that the average man cannot be a Jack-of-all-trades and the master of any one. But it certainly was not true of Audubon any more than it was true of Benjamin Franklin or Leonardo de Vinci, for in the course of his life he did a surprising variety of things, many of them exceedingly well, and two or three of them supremely well. Moreover, he turned a number of his talents to the most practical ends, and undoubtedly it was his consciousness of his ability to do this very thing—along with his inherent audacity, that prompted him, when writing to his wife in the spring of 1821, urging her to leave Cincinnati and join him in New Orleans, to make this seemingly egotistical but entirely sincere declaration: "Thou art not, it seems, as daring as I am about leaving one place to go to another, without means. I am sorry for that. I never will

fear want as long as I am well; and if God will grant me health with the little talents I have received from Nature, I would dare go to England or anywhere, without one cent, one single letter of introduction to any one."

2

Audubon's versatility began manifesting itself soon after he arrived in America, and his varied abilities were a constant source of astonishment to his friends and neighbors. One of his brothers-in-law in writing of him during the period of his residence at *Mill Grove*, said: "He had great skill in stuffing and preserving animals of all sorts. He had also a trick of training dogs with great perfection, of which art his famous dog Zepher was a wonderful example. He was an admirable marksman, an expert swimmer, a clever rider, possessed great activity, prodigious strength. . . . Besides other accomplishments he was musical, a good fencer, danced well, had some acquaintance with legerdemain tricks, worked in hair, and could plait willow baskets." Another of his *Mill Grove* neighbors has already been quoted as recording that Audubon was the swiftest ice

skater he ever saw, "even leaping over large air-holes fifteen or more feet across, and continuing to skate without an instant's delay"; while subsequent observations convinced this same neighbor that the young Frenchman was an even better dancer than he was a skater.

Of his skill as a marksman—even before he went west with Ferdinand Rozier and spent years wandering through the forests, gunning for birds for his drawings and for food for himself and his family—Audubon recorded the following incident, which, like his skating feats, also occurred while he was living at *Mill Grove:* "During the winter . . . Thomas Bakewell . . . was one morning skating with me on the Perkiomen, when he challenged me to shoot at his hat as he tossed it in the air, which challenge I accepted with great pleasure. I was to pass by at full speed, within about twenty-five feet of where he stood, and to shoot only when he gave the word. Off I went like lightning, up and down, as if anxious to boast of my own prowess while on the glittering surface beneath my feet; coming, however, within the agreed distance the signal was given, the trigger pulled, off went the load, and down on the ice came the hat of my future brother-in-law, as completely perforated as if a sieve. He repented, alas! too

late, and was afterward severely reprimanded by Mr. Bakewell."

And of a later experience, in Louisiana, that proved he was fully as competent and resourceful as a dancing master as he was skilled as a skater and marksman, he wrote: "From Woodville I received a special invitation to teach dancing, and a class of sixty was soon organized. I went to begin my duties, dressed myself at the hotel, and with my fiddle under my arm entered the ball-room. I found my music highly appreciated, and immediately commenced proceedings. I placed all the gentlemen in a line reaching across the hall, thinking to give the young ladies time to compose themselves and get ready when they were called. How I toiled before I could get one graceful step or motion! I broke my bow and nearly my violin in my excitement and impatience! The gentlemen were soon fatigued. The ladies were next placed in the same order and made to walk the steps; and then came the trial for both parties to proceed at the same time, while I pushed one here and another there, and was all the while singing myself to assist their movements. Many of the parents were present and were delighted. After this first lesson was over I was requested to *dance to my own music*, which I did until the whole room came

down in thunders of applause, in clapping of hands and shouting, which put an end to my first lesson and to an amusing comedy. Lessons in fencing followed to the young gentlemen, and I went to bed extremely fatigued."

3

At various times Audubon worked as a clerk, merchant, miller and taxidermist; earned money painting portraits, landscapes, street signs, birds, plants, flowers, animals, and the interior of an Ohio River steamboat—working in virtually every medium; devised an ingenious method—by the use of wires—of posing dead birds and animals in natural positions so that he could draw and paint them to life; gave lessons in French, fencing, drawing, dancing and music—he played a number of instruments including the violin, flute and flageolet; acquired a wide knowledge of botany, and achieved international fame as an ornithologist and naturalist; contributed articles to scientific journals; travelled extensively and explored many of the then little known parts of America; and, finally, was the author, illustrator, publisher and chief salesman of a

number of books—one of which, his *Birds of America,* still ranks as one of the most amazing projects that the scientific and publishing worlds have ever known.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE GENIUS

I

BUT with all his versatility, and all his skill, and knowledge, and determination, and audacity—in brief, with all his talents, it is by no means a certainty that John James Audubon would ever have reached his goal and astounded the world with his accomplishments if—to state the fact as simply and as straightforwardly as possible—it had not been for his wife. For while there is no question but that potentially he possessed every quality requisite to the triumphant success that he ultimately achieved, he also possessed a temperament that was so susceptible, and so vulnerable, to the disheartening and discouraging consequences of his enforced contacts with a world of practical affairs that wasn't in the least interested in what was so near and so dear to his own heart, and often regarded him as little better than a lunatic, that had he been compelled to fight the battle alone—as many an equally talented but

less fortunate man has been forced to do—the probabilities are that he would have been utterly demoralized and in the end would have accomplished nothing.

But John James Audubon was as fortunate in his marriage as he was talented by the gods. The youthful Lucy Bakewell—with whom he had fallen so ardently in love, developed into as truly remarkable a woman as was ever obscured by the overshadowing genius of a husband; and with her assistance he lived to conquer the defects and shortcomings of his temperament, overcame the obstacles that stood in his pathway, developed his talents to the full, and then, by the sheer force of his ambition and audacity climbed to the very pinnacle of accomplishment and fame.

2

"Lucy Bakewell Audubon," wrote one who knew her intimately [1]—Dr. George Bird Grinnell, the founder of the original Audubon Society—but who, in view of the part he has played in perpetuating her husband's fame, could hardly be accused of unduly magnifying

[1] *The Auk*, July, 1920.

Mrs. Audubon's talents, "was a fit mate for her great husband, for her steadfastness and determination supplied qualities which in some degree he lacked. I believe that of the two she was the stronger—as she was the better balanced character. If she did not have her husband's vivacity, charm, versatility and artistic talent, she possessed characteristics more important: the forces to keep him up to his work, the faith to cheer his heart when discouraged, the industry and patience to earn money that he might continue the struggle, and the unyielding will to hold the family together. It was largely through her assistance and support that he at last won success. Madam Audubon was a most kindly, gentle, benignant woman. She was loved and admired by everyone and—by most people—I think a little feared, for she had the repose and dignity of a great lady, and was not given to jokes and laughter. With the children she unbent far more than with older people, and they loved her dearly, and took their small troubles to her with the utmost confidence. Yet the children too stood a little in awe of her, and in her presence were never mischievous or playful at inopportune times. . . . In the school room she was tireless, passing from one child to another, seeing that each was properly at work, helping, explaining, encouraging.

During the hours of school each child received a personal supervision that was practically continuous. She was tall, slender, erect, always clad in black, and always wore her white cap. I never saw her without her spectacles."

3

In her own way—which to Audubon's everlasting advantage was as different from his as the way of one human could possibly be from that of another—Lucy Bakewell Audubon was as deeply in love with her husband as he had ever been with her. Otherwise she could never have made the sacrifices she did or devoted herself so unsparingly to the furthering of his career. For he was totally unlike any husband that she could possibly have known from her own well-to-do and rather conventionally aristocratic family, or from her limited acquaintance with life outside her family. And precipitated by her marriage into a mode of living almost as foreign to her as existence on another planet would have been, there must have been many occasions when Audubon's numerous vagaries and seeming wild goose chases—figurative as well as literal—with all the un-

certainties, discomforts and sufferings that they imposed on her and her children, taxed her patience and faith to the limit. But her love sustained her through all her troubles and perplexities, and any doubts that she may have had, she kept to herself.

"She felt the pangs of our misfortunes perhaps more heavily than I," Audubon once wrote, "but never for an hour lost her courage; her brave and cheerful spirit accepted all, and no reproaches from her beloved lips ever wounded my heart. . . ."

But love alone, however boundless and however undeviating, could never have saved John James Audubon from oblivion—could never have carried him over the yawning canyon that separated the talented but always more or less bewildered man that he had been prior to his departure from Cincinnati in the autumn of 1820, and, the definitely objective and specifically accomplishing man that he eventually became. But Audubon was indeed thrice blessed, for Lucy Bakewell Audubon not only loved him and had absolute faith in him, but, in addition, she was a veritable paragon of practicality. From the very beginning of their acquaintance she had sensed the true import of his talents, and from the day when he first confided his ambition to her she never once wavered in her belief that *he* was right

in his estimate of what he could and should do, and that the World was wrong. And when the World rendered its first Audubon verdict—that he was not merely a failure but a trifling and indolent man who had wasted the best years of his life and would never amount to anything, she still insisted that the World was wrong. And that she lived to see him prove to the World that he was right and that she had not been mistaken in her judgment of him, was due as much to her practical competence as it was to her sublime faith. For with courage and fortitude she took upon her shoulders virtually the entire responsibility of supporting herself and her children, and carried that burden for years, in order that her husband might be free to continue his ornithological studies. And so successful was she, particularly as a teacher, that eventually she was earning close to $3,000 a year—and that, it should be remembered was in the 1820's, not the 1920's! And when the time came it was Lucy Bakewell Audubon who provided the big part of the fund needed to launch John James Audubon upon his epochal undertaking.

CHAPTER XV

THE VENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN

I

WHEN Audubon rejoined his wife and his son John at the Percy plantation near Bayou Sara late in November 1824, after his wanderings up and down the Mississippi and the Ohio and his long journey through the east, his purse—as might be expected—was as flat as the proverbial pan-cake, but his portfolios were bulging with new bird pictures and he was more than ever determined to publish his book. Experiences in Philadelphia and New York, however, had convinced him that there was little or no chance of his finding an American publisher, and accordingly he decided that there was only one thing left for him to do—he must go to Europe. Mrs. Audubon not only approved the plan but promptly offered her savings to help finance the trip and assured her husband that she could and would take care of herself and their children during his absence. Audubon in turn, and with the as-

sistance of friends, organized classes in dancing and fencing and thus helped to provide some of the money needed. In the meanwhile he had been busily preparing for his forthcoming journey—arranging and classifying his pictures, retouching some and re-drawing others, making some entirely new pictures, getting his notebooks together, packing, and writing to friends and acquaintances who might give him letters of introduction to influential persons on the other side of the Atlantic. And on May 17, 1826—just twenty-one days after his forty-first birthday, he boarded the ship *Delos* at New Orleans, Captain Joseph Hatch commanding, and set sail for Liverpool.

2

All things considered, this first trip of Audubon's to England was, as one of his contemporaries [1] afterwards declared, "as audacious and hopeless an enterprise as ever entered into the head of any sanguine speculator. His friends, with the exception of his wife and children, to their credit be it spoken, regarded the whole scheme as crack-brained and hopeless. What he proposed to

[1] Parke Godwin.

himself in thus going to a foreign land, where he knew not a soul and was utterly unknown, with scarcely a penny in his pocket and no patrons to fall back on, was the publication of a work which would require the services of the most eminent engravers and colorists, and of a courageous publisher when publishers were few. . . . This work was to be executed, both as to figures and the letter press, on a scale of magnificence scarcely before attempted by any individual, and only by governments having unlimited means at command. What his enthusiasm for his project must have been, and his confidence in the merits of his drawings and his own energies it is hard for an indifferent spectator to conceive."

But fortunately—for themselves, and particularly for the stay-at-homes—audacious men and women do not anticipate the future with any marked degree of caution; nor do they estimate with anything like exacting accuracy what the realization of their ambitions is likely to cost them. Or, as Audubon himself once stated the code when a friend mildly upbraided him for pursuing, unarmed, a smuggler, and exposing himself to the risk and danger of being shot, "Well! I suppose I might have thought of this, but dear me! one cannot

always think over every action carefully before committing it."

3

The voyage itself was a long, and at times, tedious journey, lasting 64 days; nevertheless it provided Audubon with many interesting experiences. On June 26—forty days after they had left New Orleans and while the *Delos* was still in the Gulf of Mexico, he wrote: "We have been becalmed many days, and I should be dull indeed were it not for the fishes and birds, and my pen and pencil. . . . Beautiful dolphins glide by the vessel like burnished gold by day and bright meteors by night. . . . They chase the flying-fish, that with astonishing rapidity, after having escaped their sharp pursuer a while in the water, emerge, and go through the air with the swiftness of an arrow, sometimes forming part of a circle; yet frequently the whole is unavailing, for the dolphin bounds from the sea in leaps of fifteen or twenty feet, and so moves rapidly toward his prey, and the little fish falls, to be swallowed by his antagonist. . . . We caught a porpoise

about seven feet in length. This was accomplished during the night, when the moon gave me a full view of all that happened. The fish, contrary to custom, was *grained* instead of harpooned, but grained in such a way and so effectively, through the forehead, that it was then held and suffered to flounce and beat about the bow of the ship, until the man who had first speared it gave the line holding the grain to our captain, slid along the bobstay with a rope, then, after some little time and perhaps some difficulty, the fish was secured immediately about its tail, and hoisted with that part upwards. Arrived at the deck it gave a deep moan, much like the last from a dying hog, flapped heavily once or twice, and died. . . . We also caught two sharks, one a female about seven feet long, that had ten young, alive, and able to swim well; one of them was thrown overboard and made off as if well accustomed to take care of himself. . . . The weather being calm and pleasant, I felt desirous to have a view of the ship from a distance and Captain Hatch politely took me in the yawl and had it rowed all around the *Delos*. This was a sight I had not enjoyed for twenty years, and I was much pleased with it; afterwards having occasion to go out to try the bearings of the current, I again accompanied him, and bathed in the sea, not

however without some fears as to the sharks. . . . Mother Carey's Chickens (Procellaria) came about us, and I longed to have at least one in my possession. I had watched their evolutions, their gentle patting of the sea when on the wing, with the legs hanging and the web extended, seen them take large and long ranges in search of food, and return for bits of fat thrown overboard for them—I had often looked at different figures given by scientific men; but all this could not diminish for a moment the long-wished for pleasure of possessing one in the flesh. I fired and dropped the first one that came along side, and the Captain most courteously sent for it with the yawl. I made two drawings of it. . . . During many succeeding weeks I discovered that numbers flew mated side by side, and occasionally, particularly on calm, pleasant days caressed each other as ducks are known to do. . . . When full a hundred leagues at sea, a female Rice Bunting came on board, and remained with us one night, and part of a day. A warbler also came, but remained only a few minutes, and then made for the land we had left. . . . Many Sooty Terns were in sight during several days. I saw one Frigate Pelican high in air, and could only judge it to be such through the help of a telescope. . . . Since my last date I have seen a large Sword-fish,

but only saw it, two Gannets, caught a live Warbler, and killed a Great-footed Hawk. This bird, after having alighted several times on our yards, made a dash at a Warbler which was feeding on the flies about the vessel, seized it and ate it in our sight, on the wing, much like a Mississippi Kite devouring the Red-throated Lizards. The Warbler we caught was a nondescript, which I named 'The Cape Florida Songster.' We also saw two Frigate Pelicans at a great height, and a large species of Petrel, entirely unknown to me. I have read Byron's 'Corsair' with much enjoyment. . . . Saw three beautiful White-headed Pigeons, or Doves, flying about our ship, but after several rounds they shaped their course toward the Floridas and disappeared. . . . I find bathing in the sea water extremely refreshing, and enjoy this luxury every night and morning. . . . Caught four Dolphins; how much I have gazed at these beautiful creatures, watching their last moments of life, as they changed their hue in twenty varieties of richest arrangement of tints, from burnished gold to silver bright, mixed with touches of ultramarine, rose, green, bronze, royal purple, quivering to death on our hard, broiling deck. As I stood and watched them I longed to restore them to their native element in all their original strength and vitality, and

yet I felt but a few minutes before a peculiar sense of pleasure in catching them with a hook to which they were allured by false pretenses."

On June 30—a full six weeks after leaving New Orleans—he recorded: "We have at last entered the Atlantic Ocean this morning and with a propitious breeze. The land birds have left us, and I—I leave my beloved America, my wife, my children, my friends." And a week or so later he added: "My leaving America had for some time the feeling of a dream. I could scarce make up my mind fixedly on the subject. I thought continually I still saw my beloved friends, and my dear wife and children. I still felt every morning when I awoke that the land of America was beneath me, and that I would in a short time throw myself on the ground in her shady woods, and watch for, and listen to the many lovely warblers. But now that I have positively been at sea fifty-one days, tossing to and fro, without the sight or the touch of those dear to me, I feel fully convinced, and look forward with an anxiety such as I never felt before, when I calculate that not less than four months, the third of a year, must elapse before my wife and children can receive any tidings of my arrival on the distant shores to which I am bound. When I think that many more months must

run from the Life's sand-glass allotted to my existence before I can think of returning, and that my re-union with my friends and country is yet an unfolded and unknown event, I am filled with sudden apprehensions which I cannot describe nor dispel. . . . We had several days a stiff breeze that wafted us over the deep fully nine miles an hour. This was congenial to my wishes, but not to my feelings. The motion of the vessel caused violent headaches far more distressing than any seasickness I have ever experienced. Now, for the third or fourth time, I read Thomson's 'Seasons,' and I believe enjoyed them better than ever. . . . During this tedious voyage I frequently sit and watch our captain at his work; I do not remember ever to have seen a man more industrious or more apt at doing nearly everything he needs himself. He is a skilled carpenter and turner, cooper, tin and blacksmith, and an excellent tailor; I saw him making a pair of pantaloons of fine cloth with all the neatness that a city brother of the cross-legged faculty could have used. He made a handsome patent swift for his wife, and a beautiful plane for his own use, manufactured out of a piece of beech-wood that probably grew on the banks of the Ohio, as I perceived it had been part of a flat-boat, and brought on board to be used as fuel. He can

plait straw in all sorts of ways, and make excellent bearded fish-hooks out of common needles. He is an excellent sailor, and the more stormy it becomes, the gayer he is, even drenched to the skin. . . . To keep busy I go often about the deck pencil in hand, sketching the different attitudes of the sailors, and many a laugh is caused by these rough drawings."

Ireland was sighted on July 18 and "as we approached the coast a small boat neared us, and came close under our lee; the boat looked somewhat like those employed in bringing in heavy loads to New Orleans, but her sails were more tattered, her men more fair in complexion. They hailed us and offered for sale fresh fish, new potatoes, fresh eggs. All were acceptable I assure thee. They threw a light line to us most dexterously. Fish, potatoes and eggs were passed to us, in exchange for whiskey, salt pork and tobacco, which were, I trust, as acceptable to them as their wares were to us. I thought the exchange a fair one, but no! —they called for rum, brandy, whiskey, more of everything. Their expressions struck me with wonder; it was 'Here's to your Honor,'—'Long life to your Honor,' —'God bless your Honor,'—Honors followed with such rapidity that I turned away in disgust. The breeze freshened and we proceeded fast on our way. Perhaps

tomorrow may see me safe on land again—perhaps tomorrow may see us all stranded, perishing where the beautiful *Albion* went ashore."

But his melancholy forebodings were not to be realized. "I am approaching very fast the shores of England," he wrote on July 20, as the *Delos* sailed serenely up St. George's Channel. "Indeed Wales is abreast of our ship, and we can plainly distinguish the hedges that divide the fields of grain: but what nakedness the country exhibits, scarce a patch of timber to be seen; our fine forests of pine, of oak, of heavy walnut trees, of magnificent magnolias, of hickories or ash or maple, are represented here by a diminutive growth called 'furze.' But I must not criticize so soon! I have not seen the country. . . . This morning we saw Holyhead, and we are now not more than twenty-five miles from Liverpool; but I feel no pleasure, and were it not for the sake of my Lucy and my children, I would readily embark tomorrow to return to America's shores and all they hold for me"—but later the same day: "I have been on deck, and from the bow the land of England is plainly distinguishable; the sight around us is a beautiful one, I have counted fifty-six vessels with spreading sails, and on our right are mountains fading into the horizon; my dull thoughts have all

abandoned me, I am elated, my heart is filled with hope. Tomorrow we shall land at the city of Liverpool, but when I think of Custom House acceptance of Bills, hunting up lodgings,—again my heart fails me; I must on deck." The following morning, Friday, July 21, 1826, the long voyage finally ended, and Audubon found himself at last in the city of Liverpool—homesick and lonely, with "not a soul to speak to freely when Mr. Swift leaves me for Ireland," but still hopeful, and still determined to go on with his project.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

I

FIFTEEN years before that rainy mid-summer morning when he landed in Liverpool, John James Audubon—then a would-be merchant with no plans for the future, and to whom the city of Liverpool meant nothing but the merest geographical name—happened to be journeying ahorseback across the Allegheny Mountains enroute from Philadelphia to Louisville. Near the Falls of the Juniata River, in the south central part of Pennsylvania, he met another traveller, also westward bound, who said that his name was Vincent Nolte and that he was on his way to New Orleans. The two dined together and lodged at a country inn and then continued on their way toward Pittsburg. Nolte, who was a prosperous merchant-speculator by vocation and a traveller-adventurer by avocation, was amused by the incongruity of Audubon's headgear—"a Madras handkerchief wound around his head exactly in the style of the French mariners or la-

borers"—and his initial insistence, in spite of his obvious French accent, that he was an "Heenglishman," and concluded that his fellow traveller was "what in common parlance is called an 'odd fish.'" But with all his eccentricities, most of which were undoubtedly affected in a spirit of jesting, as Nolte himself suspected, Audubon proved to be "a good companionable man" and "an accomplished sketcher" and Nolte took quite a fancy to him. When they reached Pittsburg Nolte invited the "odd fish" to accompany him down the Ohio in one of his flatboats. Audubon accepted the invitation and the two continued their journey together for a week or so longer; then they separated.

During the years that followed Nolte spent much of his time in New Orleans and it is probable that occasionally Audubon saw him there and in a casual way renewed the old acquaintance. But neither referred to such meetings in any of his writings and there is no evidence that anything even approximating an intimate friendship sprang up between them. By the merest coincidence they just happened to be riding along the same mountain road on the same morning and travelling in the same direction. When they separated each went his own way and for a dozen years and more that, apparently, was the end of the story.

But when Audubon was preparing for his journey across the ocean, he hunted up Nolte—who he knew had business connections and correspondents in England—exhibited his bird pictures, told what he had been doing during the intervening years, explained about his forthcoming trip and what he hoped to accomplish by it, and then asked his one-time travelling companion if he could help him with any letters of introduction. Whereupon Nolte sat down and wrote and handed to Audubon the following letter:

Dear Sir,—

New Orleans, May 16, 1826

I have ventured to put in the hands of Mr. John J. Audubon, a gentleman of highly respectable scientific acquirements, these introductory lines to you, under the persuasion that his acquaintance cannot fail to be one of extreme interest to you. Mr. Audubon is a native of the United States, and has spent more than twenty years in all parts of them, devoting most of his time to the study of ornithology. He carries with him a collection of over four hundred drawings, which far surpass anything of the kind I have yet seen, and afford the best evidence of his skill and the perfection to which he has carried his researches. His object is to find a purchaser or publisher for them, and if you can aid him in this, and introduce him either in person or by letter to men of

distinction in arts and sciences, you will confer much of a favor on me. He has a crowd of letters from Mr. Clay, De Witt Clinton, and others for England, which will do much for him; but your introduction to Mr. Roscoe and others may do more. His collection of ornithological drawings would prove a most valuable acquisition to any museum or any moneyed patron of the arts, and, I should think, convey a far better idea of American birds than all the stuffed birds of all the museums put together.

Permit me likewise to recommend Mr. Audubon to your hospitable attentions; the respectability of his life and his family connections entitle him to the good wishes of any gentleman, and you will derive much gratification from his conversation.—I am, dear Sir, with sincere regard,

Most truly yours,
Vincent Nolte

To Richard Rathbone, Esq.,
Liverpool

At that time the name "Rathbone" meant nothing to Audubon. He already had a number of letters of introduction given to him by various friends—including one addressed to no less a personage than General Lafayette—and Vincent Nolte's note to "Richard Rathbone, Esq.," was just one more letter that he was taking with him in the hope that it might possibly be of some use to him. But the Wheel of Chance had in-

deed stopped at Audubon's lucky number that day in the Pennsylvania mountains when he first met Vincent Nolte; for the letter to Richard Rathbone, Esq., of Liverpool was soon to become for Audubon a veritable talisman of good fortune and great opportunity.

2

Audubon's introduction to the Rathbone family almost as soon as he had set foot on English soil and before his homesickness and loneliness had had sufficient time to seriously undermine his morale, was as fortunate a thing as could possibly have happened to him. For the Rathbones were a family of intelligence, means and commanding social position, and under their kindly and understanding patronage Audubon suddenly found himself surrounded by admiring and encouraging friends—who were struck quite as much by the naive charm of his personality as they were by the merit of his bird pictures—and once more confident of the future. Small wonder then that in later years his granddaughter was moved to write: "To Messrs. Wm. and Richard Rathbone, and their father Wm. Rathbone Sr., Audubon was more deeply indebted than to any other

of his many kind friends in England. Their hospitality was only equalled by their constant and valuable assistance in preparing for the publication of the *Birds*, and when this was an assured fact, they were unresting in their efforts to aid Audubon in procuring subscribers. It is with pleasure that Audubon's descendants today acknowledge the indebtedness to the 'family Rathbone' which is ever held in grateful remembrance."

Nor is it one whit less pertinent to include, here, this descriptive tribute to Audubon himself [1]—reminiscent as it is of his visit to Liverpool and his fortuitous friendship with the Rathbone family, and, written as it was, by the son of one of the very men who befriended Audubon: "To us there was a halo of romance about Mr. Audubon, artist, naturalist, quondam backwoodsman, and the author of that splendid work which I used to see on a table constructed to hold the copy belonging to my Uncle William, opening with hinges so as to raise the bird portraits as if on a desk. But still more I remember his amiable character, though tinged with melancholy by past sufferings; and his beautiful expressive face, kept alive in my memory by his autograph crayon sketch thereof, in profile, with the words

[1] From a letter written by Richard R. Rathbone on May 14, 1897 to Maria R. Audubon.

written at the foot, 'Audubon at Green Bank. *Almost* happy, 9th., September, 1826.' Mr. Audubon painted for my father as a gift, an Otter (in oils) caught by the forefoot in a steel trap and after vainly gnawing at the foot to release himself, throwing up his head, probably with a yell of agony, and displaying his wide-open jaws dripping with blood. This picture hung on our walls for many years, until my mother could no longer bear the horror of it, and persuaded my father to part with it. We also had a full-length, life-sized portrait of the American Turkey, striding through the forest. Both of these pictures went to a public collection in Liverpool. I have also a colored sketch by Mr. Audubon of a Robin Redbreast, shot by him at Green Bank, which I saw him pin with long pins into a bit of board to fix it into position for the instruction of my mother."

3

"As early as I thought proper I turned my steps to No. 87 Duke Street, where the polite English gentleman, Mr. Richard Rathbone resides," reads Audubon's record of the memorable July 24, the third day after his arrival in Liverpool. "My locks blew freely from

under my hat in the breeze, and nearly every lady I met looked at them with curiosity. Mr. Rathbone was not in, but was at his counting-house, where I soon found myself. . . . My name was taken to the special room of Mr. Rathbone, and in a moment I was met by one who acted toward me as a brother. He did not give *his card* to poor Audubon, he gave his hand, and a most cordial invitation to be at his home at two o'clock, which hour found me there. I was ushered into a handsome dining room, and Mr. Rathbone almost immediately entered the same, with a most hearty greeting. I dined with this hospitable man, his charming wife and children. Mrs. Rathbone is not only an amiable woman, but a most intelligent and highly educated one. Mr. Rathbone took me to the Exchange Building in order to see the American Consul, Mr. Maury, and others. Introduction followed introduction; then I was taken through the entire building, the Mayor's public dining hall, etc. I gazed on pictures of royalty by Sir Thomas Lawrence and others"—little did "poor Audubon" then dream that before many years had passed he too would be sitting for his portrait before some of the most celebrated portrait artists of the time!—"mounted to the dome and looked over Liverpool and the harbor that Nature formed for her. It was past five when I

went to keep my appointment with Mr. Swift"—a fellow passenger on the *Delos* who had taken lodgings with Audubon at the Commercial Inn and who was leaving Liverpool the next morning for his home in Ireland.

That was the beginning! After that Audubon's life in Liverpool became a continuous round of dinners, receptions, and private and public exhibitions of his bird pictures; while his erect and striking figure—his unfashionable clothes, his flowing locks, his handsome and commanding visage, and his enormous portfolios of drawings which he carried with him wherever he went, became one of the sights of the city. At the dinners and receptions given in his honor he was frequently asked to imitate the calls of some of the wild birds, and generally consented—"to satisfy the curiosity of the company"; but found it difficult to convince his new found friends that he had "not been devoured at least six times by *tigers*, bears, wolves and foxes" and that he "never was troubled by any larger animals than ticks and mosquitoes," which, he always hastened to explain, were "quite enough." On July 29—three weeks after he had landed, he wrote in his journal, "I dined at the Inn today for the second time only since my arrival."

His wife's sister, Mrs. Alexander Gordon—then living near Liverpool—entertained him at dinner but advised him to have his hair cut and buy a fashionable coat! He went to the theatre, "anxious to see the renowned Miss Foote," a popular actress of the time, only to discover that she "has been pretty, nay handsome, nay beautiful, but—she *has* been. The play was good, the playhouse bad, and the audience numerous and fashionable." He was completely flabbergasted by the "English weather." The changes, he noted, "are remarkable; at daylight it rained hard, at noon it was fair, this afternoon it rained again, at sunset it was warm, and now looks like a severe frost." On another occasion when he was starting on a journey of several hours duration he observed that "the morning was clear and beautiful . . . but as no dependence can be placed on the weather in this country I prepared for rain later." Early one October morning he was out walking when he met his friend William Roscoe. Birds had been flying south and frost had already touched and turned the color of the foliage. The air was chilly and Audubon was rubbing his hands together to warm them.

"A fine, warm morning this, Mr. Audubon," was Roscoe's greeting.

"Yes," replied Audubon, "the kind of a morning when I like a fire with a half a cord of wood," whereupon Roscoe laughed and assured Audubon that the trouble was that he was too tropical in his tastes.

At times he suffered keenly from the embarrassment that attended his awkward attempts to express his appreciation of the many kindnesses being shown him, declaring on one occasion, "Oh! that I had been flogged out of this miserable shyness and *mauvaise honte* when I was a youth." But his quite evident sincerity and earnestness, and the many bird and animal pictures, and portrait sketches, that he made and presented to his numerous hosts, left no doubt in any one's mind as to the genuineness of his gratitude. His early morning walks—sometimes he was abroad as early as 3 A. M.—at first aroused considerable suspicion among the night watchmen of Liverpool; but they soon got to know him, and as Audubon himself suggested probably concluded that he was a "harmless lunatic."

Strange customs and regulations—unlike anything he had ever encountered in pioneer America—were an endless source of bepuzzlement to him. "It is a singular thing," he wrote after visiting friends who lived on the outskirts of Liverpool, "that in England dinner, dessert, wines, and tea drinking follow each other so

quickly that if we did not remove to another room to partake of the last, it would be a constant repast. I walked back to Liverpool and more than once my eyes were shocked whilst crossing the fields, to see signs with these words: 'Any person trespassing on these grounds will be prosecuted with the rigor of the law.' This must be a mistake, certainly; this cannot be English freedom and liberty, surely. Of this I intend to know more hereafter; but that I saw these words painted on boards there is really no doubt." He found the newspaper so "filled with histories of murders, thefts, hangings and other abominable acts" that he could "scarce look at them," and after a visit to the Liverpool jail where he saw for the first time what he characterized as the "infamous" treadmills, he declared —with a keen appreciation of the modern viewpoint: ". . . conceive a wild squirrel in a round cage constantly moving, without progressing. The labor is too severe, and the true motive of correction, destroyed, as there are no mental resources attached to this laborious engine of shame. Why should not these criminals—if so they are—be taught different trades, enabling them when again thrown into the world to earn their living honestly? It would be more profitable to the government, and the principle would be more honorable. It

is besides injurious to health; the wheel is only six feet in diameter, therefore the motion is rapid, and each step must be taken in quick succession, and I know a quick, short step is more fatiguing than a long one. The emaciated bodies of the poor fellows proved this to my eyes, as did my powers of calculation. The circulation of air was much needed; it was frightful to me to breathe in the room where the mill was, and I left it saddened and depressed."

Through the various members of the Rathbone family he met virtually all the leading citizens of Liverpool and many other distinguished Englishmen and foreign visitors who happened to be in the city at the time, including Lord Stanley, fourteenth Earl of Derby and afterwards Prime Minister, who, although he "pointed out one defect in my drawings for which I thanked him," as Audubon noted, spent five hours examining the bird pictures—at times crawling on his hands and knees around the floor of the room where the drawings were spread out, so that he might the better compare them; praised the pictures enthusiastically, said they deserved the patronage of the Crown and invited Audubon to come and see him at his London home.

Again through the influence of the Rathbones—particularly the head of the family, William Rathbone Sr.,

who was himself an enthusiastic amateur ornithologist; William Roscoe, the historian and botanist; Dr. Thomas Stewart Traill, the naturalist; Adam Hodgson, a prominent merchant, and others, Audubon was invited to exhibit his drawings at the Royal Institution. The exhibition opened on August 1 and was attended by four hundred and thirteen persons. That night Audubon wrote: "Several gentlemen attached to the Institution wished me to be remunerated for exhibiting my pictures, but though I am poor enough, God knows, I do not think I should do that, as the room has been given to me gratis." Two days later he added: "I had no time to write yesterday; my morning was spent at the Institution, the room was again crowded. I was wearied with bowing to the many to whom I was introduced. Someone was found copying one of the pictures, but the doorkeeper, an alert Scotchman, saw his attempt, turned him out and tore his sketch." But after the first week—the exhibition continued for a month—Audubon's friends insisted that he charge an admission fee of one shilling, and although "the tormenting feeling" of showing his work for money still bothered him, he finally consented. Altogether the exhibition netted him about £100 and so far as is known this was the first money that his bird pictures had brought him in all

the twenty and more years that he had been working on them.

"When I arrived in this city," he wrote after he had been in Liverpool about a month: "I felt dejected, miserably so; the uncertainty as to my reception, my doubts as to how my work would be received, all conspired to depress me. Now, how different are my sensations! I am well received everywhere, my works praised and admired, and my poor heart is at last relieved from the great anxiety that has for so many years agitated it, for I know now that I have not worked in vain."

4

From Liverpool Audubon moved on to Manchester, where, through numerous letters of introduction—including the one given him by De Witt Clinton, then Governor of New York—he was again cordially received, and arrangements made for a second exhibition of his pictures. Just before the exhibit opened two men called on him to inquire if he wished to hire a band to entertain the visitors! Audubon thanked them and facetiously remarked that he did not think any extra music was necessary "in the company of so many song-

sters." But this time his "songsters" failed him miserably. For some reason his drawings made little or no popular appeal to the people of Manchester and the attendances at the exhibition were small and discouraging—"Only twenty people to see my birds; sad work this," he wrote on September 22, and a few days later: "My times are dull, heavy, long, painful, and my mind much harassed."

However, at the suggestion of J. S. Brooks, the American consul at Manchester, who had entertained him at dinner and manifested a friendly interest in his project, Audubon decided—although he still had no definite plan for getting his drawings published—"to have a Book of Subscriptions open to receive the names of all persons inclined to have the best illustrations of American birds yet published." Then, in a moment of despair he added, "But alas! I am but a beginner in depicting the beautiful works of God." Nevertheless the Book-of-Subscriptions idea appealed to him and he hurried back to Liverpool to confer with some of his friends there about issuing a prospectus. But his friends not only told him that it would be very unwise and unbusinesslike to issue a prospectus until he had much more information, than he then possessed, as to what it would cost him to produce his book, but

without a single exception they all declared that his idea of publishing his birds in life size was not only impractical but, on account of the high cost of such large engravings and the consequent printing problems involved, virtually impossible. Moreover, they as much as told him that it would be ridiculous for him to think of publishing, even if he could find a publisher, until he was more widely known in the scientific world and better established in the public mind. An experienced London bookseller whom he met at Dr. Traill's, advised him to proceed at once to London, meet the principal naturalists of the day, and through them see the best engravers, colorists, printers, paper merchants etc., and thus form some idea of the cost; then proceed to Paris, Brussels, and possibly Berlin, with proper letters, and follow the same course, thereby becoming able to judge of the advantages and disadvantages attached to each country and then to determine for himself when, where and how the work should be undertaken; to be during this time, through the medium of friends, correspondence, and scientific societies, announced to the world in some of the most widely read periodical publications.

"Then, Mr. Audubon," counselled the London bookseller, "issue a prospectus, and bring forth one number of your work, and I think you will succeed and do well;

but remember my observations on the *size* of your book, and be governed by this fact, that at present, productions of taste are purchased with delight, by persons who receive much company particularly, and to have your book laid on the table as a pastime, or an evening's entertainment, will be the principal use made of it, and that if it needs so much room as to crowd out other things or encumber the table, it will not be purchased by the set of people who are now the very life of the trade . . . the size must be suitable for the English market."

It is not difficult to imagine the effect of that advice —recommending as it did a long drawn-out campaign of preliminary preparations—on a temperamental and highly emotional man who had already spent nearly a quarter of a century on the work, was now well on toward his forty-second birthday, had no guaranteed financial backing, and possessed barely enough ready money to pay his living expenses through the immediately forthcoming months! The surprising thing is that Audubon did not then and there abandon the whole project and start back for America—while he still had sufficient cash to pay for his passage. But obsessed as he was with the one idea of getting his birds published, and unable to think of any better plan of procedure himself, he

concluded that his friends, and particularly the London bookseller, must know what they were talking about. Accordingly he accepted their verdict—except in the matter of the size of the birds! On this point he was adamant. A book that would show a life size and, in every detail of line and color, a true-to-life reproduction of every known American bird, from the tiniest humming bird up to and including the wild turkey and the largest species of eagle, was the very keystone of all his years of labor and sacrifice, and being the John James Audubon that he was he would as soon have thought of cutting off his right hand as consenting to the under-size reproduction of a single bird. And so, determined though he was on this particular point, he returned to Manchester, once more disheartened and discouraged by the apparently endless chain of obstacles that seemed always to be looming up just ahead of him —obstructing his pathway, delaying his journey, and causing the realization of his life's ambition to recede further and further into the remoteness of a dim and indefinite future. And to add to his other troubles, when he arrived in Manchester, he found that the man he had left in charge of his exhibition had been drunk and had neglected to collect any admisison charges.

But as certain as Audubon was, at the time, that

within a week or two he would "enter London with a head humbly bent" albeit "with a heart intently determined to conquer," such did not come to pass. Mr. Bohn, the London bookseller whom he had met in Liverpool but who had not then seen the bird drawings, called on him in Manchester and after he had examined the pictures carefully reversed his original opinion and said that he now believed that they should be published the full size of life and that he was *sure* they would pay! But he still insisted that Audubon go direct to London and follow through with the rest of the program.

However, a few days later one of Audubon's Manchester friends, a Mr. Heywood, gave him a letter of introduction to Professor Robert Jameson, the eminent Scotch scientist who had founded the Wernerian Society, and with Sir David Brewster had originated the Edinburgh Philosophical Review, and who at that time was Regius Professor of Natural History and Keeper of the Museum at Edinburgh University. So Audubon changed his mind about going to London, influenced, no doubt, by the prospect of interesting Professor Jameson in his pictures, and, his long cherished hope that he might meet and win the support of the great Sir Walter Scott—then at the very top of his fame and the

one man in the world whom John James Audubon might truly be said to have literally idolized. So at 5 o'clock on the morning of October 24, with his trunk, his bags and his portfolios of bird pictures as his sole companions, he climbed into a coach and started for Edinburgh—"leaving Manchester," as he wrote, "much poorer than I was when I entered it."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LION OF EDINBURGH

I

"WE passed so near Sir Walter Scott's seat that I stood up, and stretched my neck some inches to see it, but in vain," Audubon wrote in his journal late in the evening of October 25, 1826, as he sat in his room in old Star Hotel in the city of Edinburgh, recalling the incidents of his two day journey from Manchester. Then he added: "And who knows if I shall ever see the home of the man to whom I am indebted for so much pleasure?" And the next day he suffered an even more bitter disappointment when he was told that Sir Walter was not only busy with a new novel and his *Life of Napoleon* but was now quite a recluse and that a stranger stood little or no chance of meeting him.

But in less than three months this same Sir Walter Scott, sitting in his study at Abbotsford—for a mere glimpse of which Audubon had so eagerly jumped

from his seat and so vainly stretched his neck, as the stage rattled along the road on its way to the Scottish capital—wrote in *his* journal:[1] "January 22 (1827— . . . A visit from Basil Hall, with Mr. Audubon the ornithologist, who has followed that pursuit by many a long wandering in the American forests. He is an American by naturalization, a Frenchman by birth but less of a Frenchman than I have ever seen—no dash, or glimmer, or shine about him, but great simplicity of manners and behaviour; slight in person, and plainly dressed; wears long hair, which time has not yet tinged; his countenance acute, handsome, and interesting, but still simplicity is the predominant characteristic. I wish I had gone to see his drawings but I had heard so much about them that I resolved not to see them—'a crazy way of mine, your honor.'"

Two days later Sir Walter again wrote in his journal: "Visit from Mr. Audubon who brings some of his birds. The drawings are of the first order—the attitudes of the birds of the most animated character, and the situations appropriate; one of a snake attacking a bird's nest, while the birds (parents) peck at the reptile's eyes—they usually, in the long run, destroy him, says the

[1] *The Journals of Sir Walter Scott.*

naturalist. The feathers of these gay little sylphs, most of them from the Southern states, are most brilliant, and are represented with what, were it (not) connected with so much spirit in the attitude, I would call a laborious degree of execution. This extreme correctness is of the utmost consequence to the naturalist (but) as I think (having no knowledge of virtue), rather gives a stiffness to the drawings. This sojourner in the desert had been in the woods for months together. He preferred associating with the Indians to the company of Back Settlers; very properly, I dare say, for a civilized man of the lower order—that is, the dregs of civilization—when thrust back on the savage state becomes worse than a savage. . . ."

And on the eve of his departure from Edinburgh, Audubon received from Sir Walter the following letter —which, while it declined for obvious reasons, Audubon's request for "a few lines from your own hand to whomever you may please to introduce me," left no doubt as to the decidedly favorable impression that Audubon had made on the creator of the famed Waverly novels, or the readiness of the "mighty minstrel of the north" to testify to the high esteem in which he had come to regard the American Woodsman:

Dear Mr. Audubon,—

I am sure you will find many persons better qualified than myself to give you a passport to foreign countries, since circumstances have prevented our oftener meeting, and my ignorance does not permit me to say anything on the branches of natural history of which you are so well possessed. But I can easily and truly say, that what I have had the pleasure of seeing, touching your talents and manners, corresponds with all I have heard in your favor; and that I am a sincere believer in the extent of your scientific attainments, though I have not the knowledge necessary to form an accurate judgment on the subject. I sincerely wish your travels may prove agreeable, and remain

Very much your obedient servant

Walter Scott

Between his unsuccessful attempt merely to see the home of the great man whom he idolized, and the receipt of the just-quoted letter, lies the amazing story of Audubon's conquest of virtually the whole city of Edinburgh.

2

Having taken lodgings with a Mrs. Dickie in George Street, Audubon spent his first two or three days in

Edinburgh in a generally unsuccessful attempt to see the various persons to whom he had letters of introduction, and in wandering about the city in his seemingly aimless but thoroughly observant fashion; keenly interested in everything he saw—"a high castle here, another there, on to a bridge whence one looks at a second city below, here a rugged mountain, and there beautiful public grounds, monuments, the sea, the landscape around, all wonderfully put together indeed"—but lonely withal, and at times afflicted with "those terrible attacks of depression" from which he suffered off and on throughout his whole life.

But as is usually the case—and particularly with the Audubon type of temperament, "things are seldom what they seem" and never as bad. Before the first week was out the Messrs Patison—chance acquaintances of his stage coach journey from Manchester, brought two delegations of their friends to his rooms to see and admire his bird pictures. A number of the city's foremost professional men, most of whom he had failed to see when he called at their offices and homes, now came to see him. Professor Jameson—whom Audubon thought had received him "rather coolly" when he delivered his note of introduction to the Professor at the University—called at the George Street lodgings

at his first opportunity, entertained Audubon at breakfast, introduced him to influential citizens and in every possible way quickly proved himself to be one of the American's staunchest friends. Indeed to Professor Jameson, and to Professor John Wilson—the celebrated "Christopher North" of *Backwood's Magazine*—Audubon was chiefly indebted for his highly favorable introduction to the scientific world and for much of the popular success and fame that came to him not only in Edinburgh but throughout the world; always making due allowance, of course, for the fact that John James Audubon possessed, in addition to all his other talents, and all the picturesqueness of his physical attributes, a most engaging personality—almost child-like in his simplicity, as Sir Walter Scott observed, and yet capable of the most entertaining and animated conversation.

3

Almost over night Audubon became the sensation of Edinburgh—creating, as one French writer observed, much the same kind of a furore that Franklin had stirred up in Paris. And why not? In his own way Audubon was every bit as picturesque a character as Frank-

lin, and his long hair and the wolf-skin coat that he wore on occasions, must have made him fully as striking a figure as he walked along Princes Street as Doctor Franklin ever was strolling along the boulevards of Paris in his famous coon-skin hat.

"He was such an American Woodsman," wrote one Edinburgh commentator, "as took the shine out of us modern Athenians. His long raven locks hung curling over his shoulders, yet unshorn from the wilderness. They were shaded across his open forehead with simple elegance, such as a civilized Christian might be supposed to give his 'fell of hair,' when practicing every man his own perruquier, in some liquid mirror in the forest-glade, employing perhaps, for a comb, the claw of the eagle. His sallow fine featured face bespoke a sort of wild independence, and then such an eye—keen as that of a falcon. His foreign accent—for he is of French descent—removed him still farther out of the commonplace circle of this everyday world of ours, and his whole demeanor—it might be with us partly imagination—was colored to our thought by a character of conscious freedom and dignity, which he had habitually acquired in his long and lonely wanderings among the woods. . . . The entire appearance of the man was most appropriate to what had for so many

years been his calling, and bore upon it, not to be mistaken for a moment or overlooked, the impress, not of singularity, but of originality; in one word, of genius self-nursed, self-ripened, and self-tutored among the inexhaustible treasures of the Forest, on which, in one soul-engrossing pursuit, it had lavished its dearest and divinest passion."

Men and women prominent in every phase of the city's intellectual and social life—professors, scientists, doctors, clergymen, authors, artists, editors, Sirs, Lords, Ladies, Earls and Countesses entertained him at breakfasts, dinners and midnight suppers; and whenever they could prevail upon him to accept their invitations, for days at a time at their country estates where he lived in regal style and was continuously astounded at the richness and elegance of the homes and the elaborateness of the domestic service.

"My porte-feuitille and valise were carried down and I followed them and entered a large carriage lined with purple morocco," reads his somewhat amusing but none the less illuminating account of his visit to Dalmahoy, the ancestral home of the Earl of Morton—the Earl having sent his luxurious equipage and his liveried attendants to the George Street lodgings to convey Audubon to his destination. "Never was I in so com-

fortable a conveyance before; the ship that under easy sail glides slowly on an even sea has a more fatiguing motion; I might have been in a swinging hammock. We passed the castle, through Charlotte Square, and out on the Glasgow road for eight miles, all so swiftly that my watch had barely changed the time from one hour to another when the porter pushed open the gate of Dalmahoy. I now began to think of my meeting with the man who had been the great Chamberlain to the late Queen Charlotte. I did not so much mind meeting the Countess for I had become assured of her sweetness of disposition when we had met on previous occasions, but the Chamberlain I could not help dreading to encounter. This, however, did not prevent the carriage from proceeding smoothly round a great circle, neither did it prevent me from seeing a large, square half Gothic building with two turrets, ornamented with great lions, and all the signs of heraldry belonging to Lord Morton. The carriage stopped, a man in livery opened the door, and I walked in, giving him my hat and gloves and my American stick, (that, by the bye, never leaves me unless I leave it). Up stairs I went and into the drawing room. The Countess rose at once and came to greet me, and then presented Lord Morton to me—yes, really not me to him; for the moment

I was taken aback, I had expected something so different, I had formed an idea that the Earl was a man of great physical strength and size; instead I saw a small, slender man, tottering on his feet, weaker than a newly hatched partridge; he welcomed me with tears in his eyes, held one of my hands and attempted speaking, which was difficult to him, the Countess meanwhile rubbing his other hand. I saw at a glance his situation and begged he would be seated, after which I was introduced to the mother of the Countess, Lady Boulcar, and I took a seat on a sofa that I thought would swallow me up, so much down swelled around me. It was a vast room, at least sixty feet long, and wide in proportion, let me say thirty feet, all hung with immense paintings on a rich purple ground; all was purple about me. The large tables were covered with books, instruments, drawing apparatus, and a telescope, with hundreds of ornaments. . . . 'The yellow room,' I heard the Countess say to the lackey who showed me the way. My valise had been unpacked, and all was most comfortable, and truly yellow in this superb apartment. The bed was hung with yellow of some rich material, and ornamented with yellow crowns, and was big enough for four of my size; a large sofa and large arm chairs, all yellow, the curtains, dressing table, all indeed was yellow, intensi-

fied by the glow of a bright wood fire. My evening toilet is never a very lengthy matter,—for in my opinion it is a vile loss of time to spend as many minutes in arranging a cravat as a hangman does in tying his knot, —and I was ready long before seven, when I again gave the Countess my arm, and Lord Morton was again rolled in, in his chair. The waiters, I think there were four, were powdered and dressed in deep red, almost maroon liveries, except the butler, who was in black, and who appeared to me to hand fresh plates continuously. . . . At midnight (coffee having been served about eleven) the ladies bid us good-night, and we sat down to talk, and drink, if we wished to, Madeira wine. What a life! I could not stand this ceremony daily, I long for the woods; but I hope this life will enable me to enjoy them more than ever at a future period, so I must bear it patiently."

And of another of his experiences with the aristocracy —this time in Edinburgh proper, he wrote: "The *ton* here surpassed that at the Earl of Morton's; five gentlemen waited on us while at table, and two of these put my cloak about my shoulders, notwithstanding all I could say to the contrary. Several of these men were quite as well dressed as their master. . . . Oh! my America, how dearly I love thy plain, simple manners."

His portrait was painted, a plaster cast was made of his head, and he "was trundled into a sedan chair to church"—as he described the experience—to hear the celebrated Sydney Smith. His cranium was examined by George Combe, the noted phrenologist, and the other members of the Phrenological Society, who—as he wrote—measured his skull, "as minutely and accurately as I measure the bill and legs of a new bird," noted and numbered each protuberance according to its size, and finally declared that he was a strong and constant lover, an affectionate father, had great veneration for talent, would have made a brave general, that in his own estimation music did not equal painting, and that he was generous, quick-tempered and forgiving.

The newspapers printed long and enthusiastic articles about him—"such accounts of my drawings and myself," he declared, "that I am quite ashamed to walk the streets"; and the Royal Society granted him the free use of their rooms in Institution Hall for an extended exhibition of his pictures, insisting that an admission fee of one shilling be charged and that all the proceeds go into his own pocket. Thousands of people attended and were enthralled by the spectacle. The effect of the 400 drawings representing more than 1000 birds, wrote one of the Edinburgh chroniclers, "was like

magic. The spectator imagined himself in the forest. All (the birds) were of life size, from the wren and the humming bird to the wild turkey and the Bird of Washington. But what signified the mere size? The colors were all of life, too—bright as when borne in beaming beauty through the woods. There too were their attitudes and postures infinite as they are assumed by the restless creatures, in motion or rest, in their glees and their gambols, their loves and their wars, singing or caressing, or brooding or preying, or tearing one another to pieces. The trees, too, in which they sat or sported, all true to nature, in body, branch and spray and leaf; the flowering shrubs and the ground flowers, the weeds and the very grass—so, too, the atmosphere and the skies—all transatlantic. It was a wild and poetical vision of the heart of the New World, inhabited as yet almost wholly by the lovely or noble creatures that 'own not man's dominion.' There many a fantastic tumbler played his strange vagaries in the air; there many a cloud-cleaver swept the skies; there living gleams glanced through the forest glades; there meteor-like plumage shone in the wood gloom; there strange shapes stalked stately along the shell bright shore; and there, halcyons all, fair floaters hung in the sunshine on waveless seas. That all this wonderful creation

should have been the unassisted work of one man in his own country, wholly unfriended was a thought that woke towards the American woodsman feelings of more than admiration, of the deepest personal interest."

He was wined and dined as a guest of honor at numerous banquets, and at the St. Andrew's Day dinner of the Royal Society of Antiquarians he was so effected by the encomiums heaped upon him by the speaker who proposed the toast to him—"the perspiration poured from me and I thought I should faint," he wrote in his journal—and so embarrassed when Lord Elgin, the presiding officer, called on him for a speech, for it was the first time he had ever spoken to a large assembly, that all he could say was, "Gentlemen, my command of words in which to reply to your kindness is almost as humble as that of the birds hanging on the walls of your institution. I am truly obliged for your favors. Permit me to say, may God bless you all, and may this Society prosper." He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and also of the Society of Antiquarians; elected a member of the Wernerian Society of Natural History and the Society of Arts; read papers before the members of these notable organizations telling of his experiences and observations in the forest of America, and contributed articles

to the *Edinburgh Journal of Science*, the *Edinburgh Philosophical Review* and other publications.

4

Early in December he wrote in his journal: "My situation in Edinburgh borders almost on the miraculous. With scarce one of the qualities necessary to render a man able to pass through the throng of the learned people here, I am positively looked on by all the professors and many of the principle persons here as a very extraordinary man. I cannot comprehend this in the least."

But as incomprehensible as his situation undoubtedly was, which is not to say that he was in any sense of the word displeased with the recognition accorded him or the attention paid to him—he would not have been human if he had been—he soon began to feel the strain of the strenuous life he was leading, and to realize something of the penalties that are still attached to fame even after one has paid the original price of achieving it; for he concluded this same journal entry with, "Much as I find here to enjoy, the great round of company I am thrown in has become fatiguing to me

in the extreme, nor does it agree with my early habits. I go out to dine at six, seven or even eight o'clock in the evening, and it is often one or two when the party breaks up; then painting all day, with my immense correspondence which increases daily, makes my head feel like an immense hornet's-nest, and my body wearied beyond all calculation; yet it has to be done; those who have my best interests at heart tell me I must not refuse a single invitation."

At the end of another crowded day he wrote: "It is now half past two; what hours do I keep! Am I to lead this life long? If I do I must receive from my Maker a new supply of strength, for even my strong constitution cannot stand it." While on still another occasion he recorded: "My time is so taken up, and daylight so short, that though four hours is all I allow for sleep, I am behindhand, and have engaged an amanuensis. I go out so much that I frequently dress three times a day, the greatest bore in the world to me; why I cannot dine in my blue coat as well as a black one, I cannot say, but so it seems."

"My room today," reads the entry for December 22, "was a perfect levee; it is Mr. Audubon here, and Mr. Audubon there; I only hope they will not make

a conceited fool of Mr. Audubon at last. I received every one as politely as I could, palette and brushes in hand, and conducted each in his turn to the door. I was called from my work twenty-five times, but I was nevertheless glad to see one and all."

At times the pace became so swift and his mind so muddled that he got all mixed up in his engagements and so precipitated himself into the most embarrassing situations.

"My head was so full of all manner of thoughts," he wrote after one such experience, "that I thought it was Saturday instead of Friday, and at five o'clock I dressed in a great hurry and went to Mr. Henry Witham's with all possible speed. My Lucy, I was not expected till tomorrow. Mr. Witham was not at home, and his lady tried to induce me to remain and dine with her and her lovely daughter; but I declined, and marched home as much ashamed of my blunder as a fox who has lost his tail in a trap. Once before I made a sad blunder; I promised to dine at three different houses the same day, and when it came I discovered my error, and wrote an apology to all, and went to none."

Poor Audubon indeed! Never in the most optimistic

flights of his most hopeful imagination had he ever dreamed that he would one day ride the crest of such a tumultuous wave of popularity or that his mere presence would be so eagerly sought after by the foremost citizens of a great city.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BOOK GETS UNDER WAY

I

AMONG the numerous letters of introduction that Audubon carried with him to Edinburgh was one addressed to Patrick Neill, Esq., head of a large printing establishment but a naturalist by inclination, who received the American cordially and in turn introduced him to an engraver of some local distinction named William H. Lizars. A few days later Neill and Lizars called on Audubon to see his pictures, and no sooner had the first drawing been exhibited that Lizars jumped out of his chair and exclaimed: "My God! I never saw anything like this before." His astonishment and enthusiasm increased with each succeeding picture, and at each succeeding meeting—for there were entirely too many pictures to be seen at a single sitting; and almost before either of the two men realized what had happened Lizars had agreed to make copper engravings of five of the drawings—exactly the size of the originals,

and print and color a limited quantity of impressions from each engraving while Audubon, who had already formulated the tentative plan of publishing his book serially—five pictures or plates to constitute a number—had agreed to finance the undertaking.

"My present plans," wrote Audubon at the time, ". . . are to publish one number at my own expense and risk, and with it under my arm, make my way. If I can procure three hundred good substantial names of persons or institutions, I cannot fail doing well by my family; but, to do this, I must abandon my life to its success, and undergo many sad perplexities, and perhaps never again—certainly not for some years—see my beloved America. The work, from what I have seen of Mr. Lizars' execution, will be equal to anything in the world at present, and the rest of the world must judge for itself. I shall superintend both engraving and coloring personally, and I pray my courage may not fail, my industry I know will not. It is true the work will be procured only at a great expense, but then a number of years must elapse before it is completed, so that renders payment an easier task. This is what I shall *try;* if I do not succeed I can return to my woods and there in peace and quiet live and die. . . ."

2

Before the winter was over Lizars had finished the five engravings and completed the printing and coloring of a few of the reproductions; Audubon had secured a number of subscriptions, including one from the University of Edinburgh and another from the Countess of Morton, and *The Birds of America*—after more than twenty years of labor, suffering and discouragement, was at last definitely under way.

But as pleased as he was with the progress made in the few months that had passed since he landed in Liverpool, Audubon was under no delusions about the future. He was well aware of the fact that he was no longer a young man, and he estimated that sixteen more years would be required to complete the publication of his book. Moreover, he knew that if he was to carry his great work to anything like a successful conclusion he must solve a financial problem infinitely greater than any similar problem that had ever confronted him —and from the bitterest of experiences, he knew only too well that if there was one thing that he had never yet been able to do it was to solve any kind of a financial problem. Furthermore, most of his best friends still

maintained—even after seeing the magnificent life-like reproduction of the Turkey Cock which he had selected for the first illustration of his work—that he was making a fatal mistake in attempting to publish a book big enough to contain life size pictures of the largest as well as the smallest birds, and insisted that his project was doomed to failure.

"The whole made me most dismal," he wrote, "but yet not in the least discouraged or disheartened about my work. If Napoleon by perseverance and energy rose from the ranks to be an emperor, why should not Audubon with perseverance and energy be able to leave the woods of America for a time and publish and sell a book?—always supposing that Audubon has *some* knowledge of his work, as Napoleon had *great* knowledge of his. No, no, I shall not cease to work for this end till old age incapacitates me." And on March 17, 1827, he issued his first formal prospectus, in which he made the following declarations and promises:

> To those who have not seen any portion of the author's collection of original drawings, it may be proper to state that their superiority consists in the accuracy as to proportion and outline, and the variety and truth of the attitudes and positions of the figures, resulting from the peculiar means discovered

and employed by the author, and his attentive examination of the objects portrayed during a long series of years. The author has not contented himself, as others have done, with single profile views, but in very many instances has grouped his figures so as to represent the originals at their natural avocations, and has placed them on branches of trees, decorated with foliage, blossoms, and fruits, or amidst plants of numerous species. Some are seen pursuing their prey through the air, searching for food amongst the leaves and herbage, sitting in their nests, or feeding their young; whilst others, of a different nature, swim, wade or glide in or over their allotted element.

The insects, reptiles, and fishes that form the food of these birds have now and then been introduced into the drawings. In every instance where a difference of plumage exists between the sexes, both the male and the female have been represented; and the extraordinary changes which some species undergo in their progress from youth to maturity have been depicted. The plants are all copied from nature, and, as many of the originals are remarkable for their beauty, their usefulness, or their rarity, the botanist cannot fail to look upon them with delight.

The particulars of the plan of the work may be reduced to the following heads:

I. The size of the work is double elephant folio, the paper being of the finest quality.

II. The engravings are, in every instance, of the exact dimensions of the drawings, which, without any exception, represent the birds and other objects of their natural size.

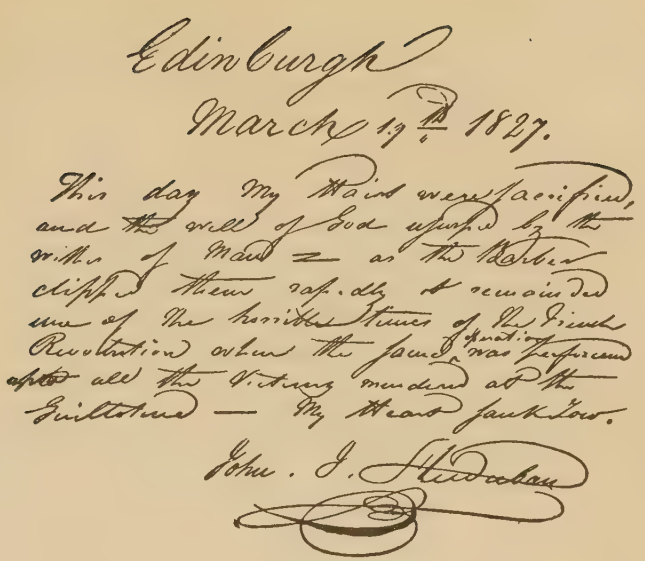
III. The plates are colored in the most careful manner from the original drawings.

IV. The work appears in numbers, of which five are published annually, each number consisting of five plates.

V. The price of each number is two guineas, payable on delivery.

Two days later, in anticipation of his forthcoming journey in search of subscribers, he finally acceded to the urgings of his friend Captain Basil Hall, and others, who insisted that it would be better for him to wear his hair in accord with the prevailing English fashion, and sent for a barber—"I knew I was acting weakly," he wrote, "but rather than render my good friend miserable about it, I suffered the loss patiently." The obituary of his shorn locks in reproduced exactly as he wrote it in his journal.

From Edinburgh he travelled by stage to Newcastle where he was entertained and his drawings praised by Thomas Bewick, the noted wood engraver, and where, in one respect, at least, he proved himself as wise as Franklin and Solomon rolled into one, for in his record of his meeting with Bewick he wrote: "The old gentle-


Edinburgh
March 19th 1827.
This day My Hairs were sacrificed,
and the will of God upheld by the
will of Man — as the Barber
clipped them rapidly & reminded
me of the horrible times of the French
Revolution when the locks was performed
after all the victims murdered at the
Guillotine — My Heart sank low.
John J. Audubon

FACSIMILE OF AUDUBON'S OBITUARY OF HIS SHORN LOCKS

From his European Journal, and reproduced through the courtesy of Charles Scribner's Sons.

man and I stuck to each other; he talked of my drawings, and I of his wood cuts, till we liked each other very much." Then he moved on to York and Leeds, holding exhibitions of his pictures in his lodgings—as he had also done in Newcastle—and soliciting subscriptions; proceeded next to Manchester where he secured a few more orders and replenished his none too substantial exchequer by painting a picture of a group of doves which he sold for £20 to his friend E. W. Sergeant who was an old acquaintance of his Philadelphia friend Dr. Richard Harlan; spent several days with the Rathbones in Liverpool, and late in May arrived in London.

3

Like all true woodsmen Audubon instinctively disliked and more or less distrusted all big cities, once remarking to his friend Parke Godwin who had "come up from New York" to spend a Sunday with him—he had then established his permanent home at *Minniesland* in the wilderness along the Hudson, *now* Riverside Drive and One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street, New York City!—"How kind it is to come to see me; and how wise, too, to leave that crazy city! Do you

know, how I wonder that men can consent to swelter and fret their lives away amid those hot bricks and pestilent vapors, when the woods and fields are all so near? It would kill me soon to be confined in such a prison house and when I am forced to make an occasional visit there, it fills me with loathing and sadness. Ah! how often, when I have been abroad on the mountains, has my heart risen in grateful praise to God that it was not my destiny to waste and pine among these noisome congregations of the city."

So it is not at all surprising to find him—eager though he was to get to London, and conscious as he also was of the opportunities the great city offered him for the furthering of his work, writing in his journal under the date of May 21, 1827: "I should begin this page perhaps with a great exclamation mark, and express much pleasure, but I have not the wish to do either; to me London is just like the mouth of an immense monster, guarded by millions of teeth, from which if I escape unhurt it must be called a miracle. I have many times longed to see London, and now I am here I feel a desire beyond words to be in my beloved woods. The latter part of the journey I spent closely wrapped in both coat and cloak, for we left Shrewsbury at ten, and the night was chilly; my companions were

Mr. Bentley and two Italians, one of whom continually sang, and very well, while the other wished for daylight. In this way we continued till two of the morning, and it was then cold. From twelve until four I was so sleepy I could scarcely hold my head up, and I suffered much for the want of my regular allowance of sleep which I take between these hours; it is not much, yet I greatly missed it. We breakfasted at Birmingham at five, where the worst stuff bearing the name of coffee that I have ever tasted was brought to us. I say *tasted*, for I could do no more. The country constantly improved in beauty; on we drove through Stratford-on-Avon, Woodstock and Oxford. A cleaner and more interesting city I never saw; three thousand students are here at present. It was ten o'clock when we entered the turnpike gate that is designated as the line of demarcation of London, but for many miles I thought the road forming a town of itself. We followed Oxford Street its whole length, and then turning about a few times came to the Bull and Mouth tavern where we stay the night."

However, after two gloomy days during which he could not bring himself to write even a line in his journal, but followed his friend Bentley about the city "as an ox to the slaughter," he began to remember why

he was in London; found comfortable lodgings at 55 Great Russell Street—just across the way from the British Museum—and started out to deliver his letters of introduction, "noting nothing but the great dome of St. Paul's Cathedral," just as the present day visitor in London still finds that same historic structure atop Ludgate Hill dominating the sky-line of the whole vast city.

4

So extreme were Audubon's experiences during the greater part of the two years that intervened between his arrival in London and his departure for America—one evening dining with nobility and the next peddling his paintings about the streets of the city and glad to sell them at any price—that he hardly knew from week to week, sometimes from day to day, whether he was on the threshold of success or the brink of disaster. And that he not only survived this prolonged crisis but finally succeeded in hammering some of his most troublesome stumbling blocks into building stones which he then utilized in the construction of the very foundation upon which he reared his ultimate triumph,

was due to his own indominable courage and resourcefulness—plus the friendly assistance given him by a small group of citizens of that same "monster" of a city from which, as he had written, he feared he could not possibly escape unscathed save by a miracle!—notably John George Children, secretary of the Royal Society and head of the Department of Zoology of the British Museum; Sir Thomas Lawrence, the portrait artist, and Robert Havell Jr., a young engraver and colorist who came very close to being a genius himself.

It was Children, who had never seen Audubon until he called with a letter of introduction given him by one of his Edinburgh friends, who introduced the American and his pictures to many of the leading scientific societies of London; paved the way for the presentation of *The Birds of America* to King George IV—which made it possible for Audubon to announce that his book was being issued "Under the Particular Patronage and Approbation of his Most Gracious Majesty"; acted as Audubon's chief preceptor and so guided him safely through his most perplexing difficulties; with Lord Stanley, was largely instrumental in securing Audubon's election to a Fellowship in the Royal Society of London—the famous *F.R.S.*, which Audubon prized more highly, probably, than all the other honors

that were ever bestowed upon him; served as Audubon's London representative while the latter was in America soliciting subscribers and gathering additional material for his book, and finally, as evidence of his respect for Audubon as an artist and ornithologist, subscribed, himself, for *The Birds of America.*

But Audubon hadn't much more than become acquainted with Children and met a few of the leading lights in the scientific world of London when he received word from Lizars that his colorers had struck, that "everything was at a standstill," and that while he would "do his best to bring all right again" he thought it advisable for Audubon to look around and see if he could find some one in London who would take over the work of coloring the prints. Audubon immediately began to search for colorers, but before he found any that he thought were competent to do his work, or that he could afford to employ, a second and even more disconcerting letter arrived from Lizars which not only stated that the trouble in Edinburgh had not cleared up but was worded in such a manner that Audubon, although completely at a loss to understand the situation, concluded that for some reason Lizars did not wish to continue any part of the work. Before he left Edinburgh he had commissioned Lizars to proceed with the

engravings for the second number—convinced that he had found just the man he had been looking for. Now, apparently, everything had gone wrong and he must start all over again. For days he walked his distracted way about the streets of London. Finally he found Robert Havell Jr., who agreed to finish a batch of the uncolored prints that had arrived from Lizars, and to make one new plate to demonstrate his skill as an engraver. Audubon was so pleased with Havell's work, and considered it so superior in every way to Lizars' that he promptly took the whole job away from Lizars and gave it to the Londoner. Under this new arrangement young Havell was to do the engraving; his father Robert Havell Sr., the printing, and then father and son and a staff of assistants were to do the coloring—all working under Audubon's personal supervision. The Havells immediately ordered the necessary materials for their work, began organizing their staff of helpers, and were soon showing results.

Then Audubon suddenly awakened to the fact that he had given the Havells a contract for work that would cost him thousands of dollars, or pounds, as he was then figuring his money problems; that if he wanted to retain their services he would soon have to begin making payments to them; that he had barely

enough ready cash to pay his own day-to-day living expenses, and that it would be quite some time before he had enough subscribers to his book to pay for its production—certainly as thoroughly unsound and unbusinesslike a situation as any one could very well get himself into. But men like John James Audubon seem to have the incorrigible habit of persisting in doing just such impractical things; and since the World always fails to convince them that they are wrong—even when it crucifies them—they will probably go right on doing the same impractical things to the end of Time. In this particular instance Audubon was saved from the impending catastrophe by his own versatile ability and determination, and the friendly generosity of Sir Thomas Lawrence, who was then at the height of his popularity as a fashionable portrait painter, and whom Audubon had met through a letter of introduction given to him by his friend Thomas Sully, of Philadelphia.

"I painted all day, and sold my work during the dusky hours of evening, as I walked through the Strand and other streets where the Jews reigned," reads his journal record of his desperate struggle to save himself from financial bankruptcy and his book from what would undoubtedly have been its final disaster, "popping in and out of the Jew-shops or any others, and

never refusing the offers made me for the pictures I carried fresh from the easel. . . . I sold seven copies of the Entrapped Otter. . . . In other pictures, also, I sold from seven to ten copies, merely by changing the course of my rambles. . . . I recollect that once, through inadvertence, when I called at a shop where I had sold a copy of a picture, the dealer bought the duplicate at the same price he had given for the first!"

In the meanwhile the bills kept piling up and Audubon was almost at his wits' end when Sir Thomas Lawrence arrived at his lodgings one morning and inquired about the prices of a number of recently finished paintings. A few hours later he returned with two friends, each of whom purchased pictures, one paying twenty pounds sterling for a copy of the *Entrapped Otter*, and the other fifteen sovereigns for *A Group of Common Rabbits*. Later the same day he arrived with three more friends, who also purchased pictures, at seven, ten and thirty-five pounds respectively.

"Without the sale of these pictures," Audubon wrote, "I was a bankrupt when my work was scarcely begun, and in two days more I should have seen all my hopes of the publication blasted; for Mr. Havell (the engraver) had already called to say that on Saturday I must pay him sixty pounds. I was then not only not

worth a penny, but had actually borrowed five pounds a few days before to purchase materials for my pictures. But these pictures which Sir Thomas sold for me enabled me to pay my borrowed money, and appear full handed when Mr. Havell called. Thus I passed the Rubicon!"

5

But Audubon's troubles did not end with the passing of one Rubicon. Subscribers were continually changing their minds, deciding that they did not want his book, and discontinuing their payments. Agents, whom he had appointed to look after his interests in the various cities where he had sold subscriptions, neglected to deliver the prints and collect the payments due. Some of the prints that Lizars sent to subscribers at the time he was having trouble with his colorers, were so poorly colored that Audubon had to replace them with new prints. On another occasion he complained about the "miserable daubing" that one of the Havell colorers was doing and asked that the fellow be dismissed unless he improved; whereupon all the colorers stopped work, and it was several days before this difficulty was ad-

justed. Not infrequently he was received by prospective subscribers with "rude coldness" and sometimes "with that arrogance which belongs to the parvenus," while one member of the nobility took occasion to tell him that his birds were all alike and his book an out and out swindle. It is no wonder that he often grew disheartened, almost wished he had never undertaken his great task, and frequently longed to be back in America with his wife and children, and his beloved birds.

But by dint of the hardest kind of work—often travelling from city to city by the night stage and soliciting subscriptions and painting and selling pictures by day—and with the assistance of his loyal friends who did everything they possibly could to help him and encourage him, he arrived at the beginning of 1828 with his affairs in surprisingly good condition, and celebrated the advent of the new year by "swearing off" on taking snuff—with the following declaration: ". . . this morning I emptied my snuff box, locked the box up in my trunk, and will take *no more*. The habit within a few weeks has grown upon me, so farewell to it; it is a useless and not very clean habit, besides being an expensive one. Snuff! Farewell to thee." And he lived up to his resolution—for quite some time!

On January 6, he wrote in his journal: "I have spent the whole day going over my drawings, and decided on the twenty-five that are to form the numbers for 1828," and a few days later he added: "A long morning with Havell settling accounts; it is difficult work for a man like me to see that I am neither cheating nor cheated. All is paid for 1827, and I am well ahead in funds. Had I made such regular settlements all my life, I should never have been as poor a man as I have been; but on the other hand I should never have published *The Birds of America*. . . ."

In the course of his subscription soliciting tours Audubon visited Cambridge and Oxford; was entertained by the professors of both universities, and secured a number of orders for his book. Early in September, in company with William Swainson, the English naturalist, Mrs. Swainson, and a portrait painter named Parker, he crossed the English Channel and spent two months in Paris. There he met many of the foremost French scientists and artists of the day and had some of his bird pictures and the first number of his book presented to the various learned societies—notably the Academy of Sciences of the National Institute, before which the distinguished Baron Cuvier read his famous report in which he declared *The Birds of America* to be "the

most magnificent monument which has yet been erected to ornithology"; adding, that if the book were completed on the scale on which it was then projected "we shall be obliged to acknowledge that America, in magnificence of execution, has surpassed the old world." He secured a number of subscriptions—including one from King Charles X, and another from the Duke of Orleans; and "thrilled with pride" when François Gerard, the celebrated French artist and portrait painter, grasped his hand and said, "Mr. Audubon, you are the king of ornithological painters; we are all children in France and Europe. Who would have expected such things from the woods of America?" During his spare hours he wandered about the city sight-seeing; found the ground floor of the famous Palais Royal—much as it is today—"filled with small shops, themselves filled with all sorts of bagatelles"; was amazed at the seemingly helter-skelter conglomeration of street traffic, and—just as the Twentieth century visitor in the French capital is still puzzled by the same phenomena, "wondered that so few accidents take place."

Early in November he returned to London. His trip had cost him forty pounds and had netted him only thirteen subscriptions, but he had gained much in prestige and reputation and considered the money and time

well spent. When spring came he decided to return to America. The Havells were making steady progress on his book and he knew from his year and a half's experience with them that he could now depend upon them to do their work just as thoroughly during his absence as if he were right there in London to watch over it. His friend Children had agreed to act as his London representative; in all the other cities where he had sold subscriptions he now had competent and trustworthy agents; and on April 1, 1829, he sailed from Portsmouth on the packet-ship *Columbia* for New York.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT RATTLESNAKE CONTROVERSY

I

ALTHOUGH he crossed the Atlantic Ocean twelve times Audubon was always a "poor sailor," for as he frankly admitted he had an unconquerable dislike of deep water and suffered from the most distressing attacks of seasickness on all his voyages. Nevertheless, and as paradoxical as the statement may seem, he invariably found the ocean to be a genuine haven of rest—for it was the one place where, for the time being, at least, he could completely escape the worries and misfortunes that harassed him throughout so much of his life. And this was peculiarly true of his voyage from England to America in the spring of 1829, for his famous rattlesnake controversy was already well on its way to becoming one of his most embarrassing experiences.

This, like many bitter and prolonged controversies,

started in the most innocent way. In response to an invitation received from the Wernerian Society of Natural History—which had conferred an honorary membership upon him soon after his arrival in Edinburgh —Audubon appeared before the assembled members of that distinguished organization on the afternoon of February 24, 1827, and read an original paper entitled "Notes on the Rattlesnake"—a subject, incidentally, on which he should certainly have been well qualified to speak, for while he made no pretence of being a scientific zoologist, he had, during his many years of wandering in the wilds of America, encountered and studied scores of these venomous reptiles, many of which he had killed and dissected.

Wide experience, he said, in beginning this much mooted paper, had convinced him that the "power of fascination," which most snakes were popularly supposed to possess, did not exist in fact but was purely an imaginary attribute that had been gratuitously ascribed to them by "theoretical naturalists," and that since "rattlesnakes in particular appear to have acquired their chief fame from this supposed charm," he proposed to tell his hearers just what real and extraordinary faculties the rattlesnake did possess. These, he said, consisted chiefly of swiftness, powers of extension

and diminution of almost all their parts, quickness in sight, in being amphibious, in possessing the wonderful and extraordinary benefit of torpidity during winter, and long continued abstinence at other periods, without, however, in the meantime losing the venomous faculty, the principal means of defense; and in support of these various contentions he then related a number of remarkable experiences, the most notable of which follow:

"Rattlesnakes," he declared, "hunt and secure for their prey, with ease, grey squirrels that abound in our woods; therefore they must be possessed of swiftness to obtain them. Having enjoyed the pleasure of beholding such a chase in full view in the year 1821, I shall detail its circumstances. Whilst lying on the ground to watch the habits of a bird which was new to me, previous to shooting it, I heard a smart rustling not far from me, and turning my head that way, saw, at the same moment, a grey squirrel full grown, issuing from the thicket, and bouncing off in a straight direction, in leaps of several feet at a time; and not more than twenty feet behind, a rattlesnake of ordinary size pursuing, drawn apparently out to its full length, and sliding over the ground so rapidly, that, as they both moved away from me, I was at no loss to observe the snake gain upon the squirrel. The squirrel made for a tree, and ascended

to its topmost branches as nimbly as squirrels are known to do. The snake performed the same task considerably more slowly, yet so fast, that the squirrel never raised its tail, nor barked, but eyed the enemy attentively as he mounted and approached. When within a few yards, the squirrel leaped to another branch, and the snake followed by stretching out full two-thirds of its body, whilst the remainder held it securely from falling. Passing thus from branch to branch with a rapidity that astonished me, the squirrel went in and out of several holes, but remained in none, knowing well that, wherever its head could enter, the body of his antagonist would follow; and, at last, much exhausted and terrified, took a desperate leap, and came to earth with legs and tail spread to their utmost to ease the fall. That instant the snake dropt also, and was within a few yards of the squirrel before it had begun making off. The chase on land again took place, and ere the squirrel could reach another tree, the snake had seized it by the back, near the occiput, and soon rolled itself about in such a way that, although I heard the cries of the victim, I scarcely saw any portion of its body. So full of its ultimate object was the snake, that it paid no attention to me, and I approached it to see in what manner it would dispose of its prey. A few minutes elapsed,

when I saw the reptile loosening gradually and opening its folded coils, until the squirrel was left entirely disengaged, having been killed by suffocation. The snake then raised a few inches of its body from the ground, and passed its head over the dead animal in various ways to assure itself that life had departed; it then took the end of the squirrel's tail, swallowed it gradually, bringing first one, and then the other of the hind legs parallel with it, and sucked with difficulty, and for some time, at them and the rump of the animal, until its jaws became so expanded, that after this, it swallowed the whole remaining parts with apparent ease."

Audubon then told how he killed the snake by tapping it on the head, which it raised as well as its tail, just as it began for the first time to rattle; and that when he cut it open he found the squirrel "lying perfectly smooth, even as to its hair, from its nose to the tip of its tail," adding that when he related the experience to his friend James Pirrie on whose lands in the state of Louisiana he was then hunting, Mr. Pirrie laughingly said, "Why, my dear sir, I could have told you this long ago, it being nothing new to me. . . .

"That almost all snakes can swim," Audubon continued, "and do swim well, too, and can remain under water a considerable time, is a fact sufficiently ascertained

but that, in this element, they have the power of pursuing fish, and of catching either them or frogs, is a fact which, though equally true, is not so well known. I shall, therefore, present to you some proofs of this from my own observation. Whilst fishing on the banks of the Schuylkill river, not very far from Philadelphia, about twenty years ago, I saw a snake issue out of the water close to me, and slide up a large stone to receive the benefit of the sun. I perceived it to be swelled about its middle, and shot it to ascertain its contents, when I discovered in the stomach a cat-fish scarcely dead; so fresh, indeed, that I made it my prize, and felt no ways alarmed at eating it when dressed. Since that time I have had opportunities to see snakes chasing bull-frogs, follow them after they had leaped into the water, and return with them in their mouths. Several other species, indeed, make the water their almost constant abode, one of which the Congo (C. nigra,) an extremely venomous snake, is found in great numbers in all the lakes and watery swamps of the Southern states. . . . Periodical torpidity in snakes, as in almost all animals subject to it, has been wisely ordered, on account of the very slow growth granted to most of them. Snakes, as well as alligators, increase in size very slowly, and are, consequently, long-lived; but how transient, if needed, this

most wonderful power granted them to live, to die (as it were) and to live again, is, I shall try to describe by the following curious fact:—M. Augustine Bourgeat, whose name will be ever dear to me, my younger son, and myself, were hunting one winter-day for ducks, and having halted a while near a lake, we struck up a fire. Being desirous to eat what we were pleased to call our dinner, we began picking and cleaning some of our game. The youngest of our party ran about for wood, and, anxious that a good supply should be at hand, attempted to roll a log, at a short distance, toward the spot pitched on. In doing this, my son discovered so large a rattlesnake closely coiled up, in a torpid state, that he called us to come and look at it. It was stiff as a stone, and, at my request, my son put it into my game-bag, then upon my back, for further observation. Shortly afterwards, whilst our game was roasting upon the wooden forks, stuck in front of our cheerful fire, I felt something moving behind me, which I thought for a moment was occasioned by the struggles of a dying duck but presently recollecting the dangerous animal, I begged my friends to see if it was not the snake; and being assured that it was, the time employed in unstrapping and throwing off the bag with the reptile, was, I assure you, of very short duration.

The snake was then quite alive, issued from the bag, and began rattling, with its head elevated, and thus ready, while the body was closely coiled, to defend itself from all attacks. The distance at which it then was from our fire, and the consequent cold, would, I thought, soon conquer it: and in this I was not mistaken; for, before our ducks were roasted, the snake had stopped its alarum, and was bent on finding a place of refuge, again to become torpid. Having finished our meal, my son, who had watched all its movements with the eagerness of youth, brought it again, with a smile, saying, 'Papa, look at Hercules and the serpent!' We took it home, and it became torpid, or revived, at our pleasure, as often as we removed or brought it near the fire; until having put it in a jar of spirits, it travelled to the Lyceum of New York. . . ."

He then told of a rattlesnake that he kept in a cage for three years, during which period it ate none of the food that, from time to time was offered to it, and did not grow even a fraction of an inch, adding, "I now and then turned the snake out of its cage, when, with great quickness, it would go about the room, looking in all directions, with a view to effect its escape. As I was armed with a long stick, it never made toward me, but if I put myself in its way, it would stop, prepare

for action, and rattle until I removed, and afforded it a free passage. Rattlesnakes are easily disabled, and afterwards killed. A single smart blow, even of a slender twig, will disjoint any part of the vertebrae, after which they lie at your mercy."

The paper concluded with a hair-raising description of a colony of 30 or more full grown rattlesnakes during the spring mating period—their new skins brightly colored and "glistening with cleanliness," their eyes "full of life and fire," their mouths open and hissing, and their tails rattling a furious and terrifying warning against any possible intrusion by an enemy.

"Having finished," Audubon wrote in his journal that evening, "I was cheered by all, and the thanks of the Assembly unanimously voted. My cheeks burned, and after a few questions had been put to me by the president and some of the gentlemen present, I handed my manuscript to Professor Jameson and was glad to be gone."

2

A few months later Professor Jameson published the "Notes on the Rattlesnake" in the *New Philosophical Journal,* and in due time a copy of that publica-

tion arrived in Philadelphia where the article was reprinted in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, a widely read scientific periodical edited by Dr. Thomas P. Jones, who was also Superintendent of the U. S. Patent Office at Washington and professor of chemistry in the Medical Department of Columbia University. But in the very next issue of his publication Dr. Jones repudiated the whole article as a "tissue of falsehoods" and denounced Audubon as an impostor.

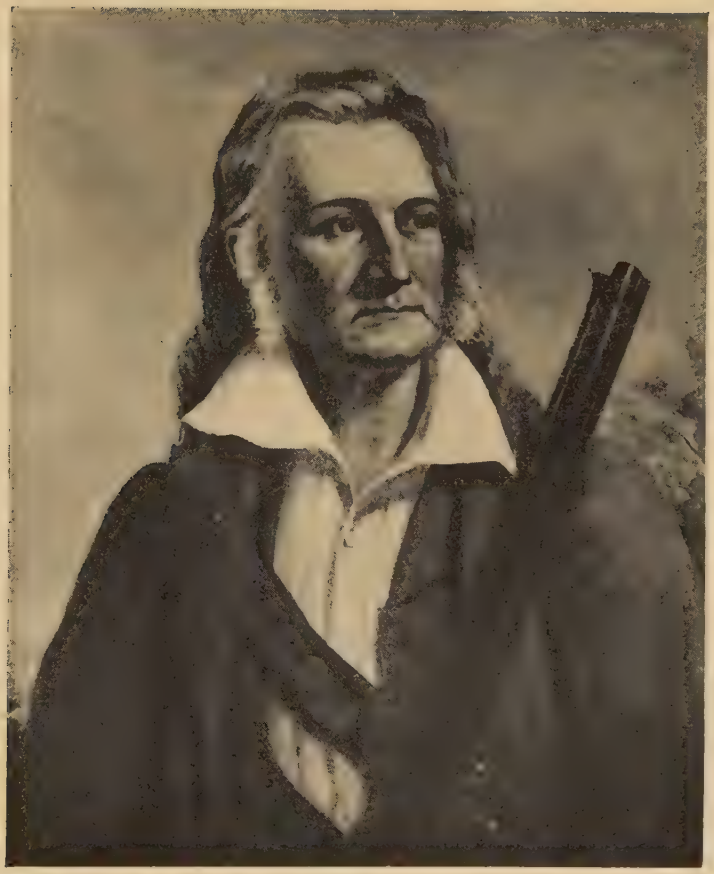
"Just as the Editor was leaving Philadelphia for Washington," read Dr. Jones' editorial, "he was pressed for 'more copy' by his printers, and hastily marked some articles for insertion, among which were 'Notes on the Rattlesnake,' by John James Audubon, F. R. S. E., M. W. S., & c. Time did not permit reading the article, but it was seen that the writer proposed to offer the 'fruits of many years' observation in countries where snakes abound.' This, with his titles, and the bold and splendid assurances which we had seen respecting the publication of his works, served as a password to his tissue of falsehoods, which would have been expunged from the proof, but for absence from the press. We had determined to publish a notice like the foregoing, when we received a note from a scientific friend, whose remarks are, at once, so pointed and correct, and so fully

express our own ideas upon the subject, that we gladly adopt, and insert them: 'It is a tissue of the grossest falsehoods ever attempted to be palmed upon the credulity of mankind, and it is a pity that anything like countenance should be given to it, by republishing it in a respectable journal. The romances of Audibon (Audubon) rival those of Munchausen, Mandeville, or even Mendez de Pinto, in the total want of truth, however short they may fall of them in the amusement they afford.'"

When these charges were made against him Audubon was in London, working day and night to stave off bankruptcy, and striving with every ounce of his energy to save his newly launched *Birds of America* from complete failure, and thus occupied, and with none of the modern means of rapid communication at his command, he was in a decidedly disadvantageous position for defending himself. But fortunately he had a number of friends in America, including several prominent Philadelphia scientists and professional men, who promptly declared that the charges against him were as malicious as they were ridiculous, and immediately began accumulating and publishing evidence in support of his various statements concerning the rattlesnake—particularly with respect to its climbing habits, for in addition to

all that he had written on the subject, he had, in his study of the mocking bird, pictured a rattlesnake as having climbed a large bush and being engaged in a furious battle with a whole family of these birds for the possession of their nest, and this, in turn, had subjected him to further criticism.

One of Audubon's staunchest supporters was Colonel J. J. Abert, a scientist of note who at that time was connected with the Bureau of Topographical Engineers of the United States Army, and in a letter to Dr. Richard Harlan of Philadelphia, another of Audubon's loyal friends, Colonel Abert wrote: "I have been informed, that some of our learned city gentlemen, have doubted the truth of his (Audubon's) representation of the rattlesnake attacking a mocking bird's nest, from an opinion that the rattlesnake does not climb, an opinion, by the way, more common in our cities, than with our hunters in the wilds, in which this reptile is generally found. But as I am possessed of some facts, which prove that the rattlesnake does climb, I will, in justice to Mr. Audubon, relate them to you. When Lieut. Swift of our army, was engaged in a survey in Florida, in 1826, his attention was suddenly called to a group of his men, within about 100 ft., from where he stood. They had just killed a snake, which the men assured him they



AUDUBON AT THE APEX OF HIS CAREER

From a portrait painted by his two sons, John Woodhouse and Victor Gifford Audubon, and reproduced through the courtesy of The American Museum of Natural History.

had seen seize a grey squirrel on the limb of a tree, about 15 ft., from the ground, and fall to the earth with it. When Lieut. Swift had arrived at the place, the snake was already killed, and much mangled. He did not examine it for the rattle; but his Florida hunters, who are as familiar with the appearance of the rattlesnake as we are with that of the chicken told him that it was a rattlesnake."

Colonel Abert added that General Jessup, the Quartermaster General of the Army, assured him he had often seen rattlesnakes upon bushes and that he once saw one up a papaw tree; that General Gibson, the Commissary General of the Army, had also seen rattlesnakes upon bushes and upon the top rail of fences, and that once he saw a rattlesnake in the fork of a large tree eight feet from the ground and that he knocked the snake out of the fork and killed it; and concluded his letter with, "I could cite many other cases, but I prefer limiting myself to these, as I am personally acquainted with the gentlemen named and received the stories from their own mouths."

Dr. Thomas Cooper, a former Judge in the Court of Common Pleas in Pennsylvania, and erstwhile professor of chemistry at Dickinson College and the University of Pennsylvania, wrote from his home in Colum-

bia, S. C., that he and his son and two negro servants had but a short time before observed a rattlesnake climbing up a rail fence that separated his garden from the road; that the reptile had reached the next to the top rail when one of the servants shot it, and that upon examining it it was found to be more than 4 feet long, as thick as a man's wrist, and had seven rattles.

3

In the course of a year or two the controversy crossed the Atlantic and made its appearance in London where an Englishman named Charles Waterton, who had been something of a traveller and adventurer in the wilds of Central and South America, had made a short tour of the United States, and published a book or two on natural history, wrote a series of caustic letters to the editor of the *Magazine of Natural History* in which he ridiculed Audubon as a naturalist and scoffed at practically everything the American had said in his "Notes on the Rattlesnake." Curiously enough, when Waterton began his London attack, Audubon was in America soliciting subscriptions and gathering additional material for his book, and consequently he was in much the

same disadvantageous position for defending himself against this new attack as he had been when the original charges were made against him in Philadelphia. But he was doubly fortunate in this instance for he not only had many friends in both England and Scotland who were only too willing to do battle in his behalf, but his son Victor—now grown to be a young man, happened to be in London at the time acting as his father's representative, and Waterton's charges were answered as fast as they were made. And just by way of demonstrating that Waterton's own snake stories were quite as vulnerable to doubt and criticism as Waterton seemed to think that Audubon's were, the Rev. John Bachman, a noted clergyman and naturalist of Charleston, S. C., who later collaborated with Audubon in writing *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, said in one of his answers to Waterton's numerous attacks: "Audubon has been rudely assailed about a 'snake story,' but Waterton has given us several stories that fairly fill us with wonder and dismay. Instead of a contemptible rattlesnake, as thick as a man's arm, he tells us of a great Boa which he encountered in his den. Dashing forward headlong upon the Boa, he pierced him with his lance, and tying up his mouth carried him as a trophy to the British Museum. The snake was

so large that it took three men to carry it, and so heavy that they had to rest ten times. He gives another snake story—a snake ten feet long. Waterton was alone. He seized him by the tail, the snake turned around and came upon him with open mouth, seeming to say, 'What business have you to meddle with my tail!' In this emergency, he put his fist in his hat, and rammed it down the snake's throat; suffering the snake to wind itself around his body, he walked home. . . . I am somewhat indifferent with regard to Mr. Waterton and his marvelous book; but it is well for the public to know who this champion of truth is, that comes to accuse the American ornithologist of exaggeration."

The controversy was never completely settled and for years naturalists and zoologists argued over certain of Audubon's statements. In fact to this day some of his greatest admirers—while frankly admitting that he probably knew as much about the rattlesnake as any of his contemporaries and more than most of them, still maintain that the snake that Audubon said he saw pursue a squirrel up a tree, and afterwards killed, was not a rattler but a blue racer, or black snake, which is now known to do all the things that Audubon described in the squirrel incident, and that in some way, which no-

body has ever been able to explain, he confused these two snakes.

But be all this as it may Audubon's friends did succeed in convincing not only the public but the scientific world as well, that while he may have made some mistakes and errors—as he unquestionably did, although he never made any retraction of the rattlesnake-squirrel episode—he was not, in any sense of the word, a nature-fakir, but a sincere and painstaking student and recorder of the phenomena of Nature, and, in many respects, the most gifted artist-ornithologist the world has ever known. And they achieved this triumph—materially aided by the serious and earnest manner with which Audubon applied himself to his great work instead of engaging in acrimonious argument with his accusers—in the face of what they declared was a deliberate conspiracy to ruin his reputation and prevent the publication of *The Birds of America* and his almost equally famous *Ornithological Biographies*.

CHAPTER XX

ACCUSATIONS AND RECRIMINATIONS

I

ACCORDING to Audubon's friends, the conspiracy against him—of which the rattlesnake controversy was only one phase—was the outgrowth of jealousy on the part of a small but active group of Philadelphians who were interested in the publication of Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology*. On the other hand, the anti-Audubon forces—of which George Ord, an influential member of The American Philosophical Society and The Academy of Natural Sciences and later president of the latter institution, was probably the leading spirit—charged Audubon with being everything that a naturalist or an ornithologist should not be—as per Dr. Jones' scathing editorial in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* repudiating the "Notes on the Rattlesnake"; and in addition they accused him of plagiarism.

This quarrel had its genesis in a quite casual meeting between Audubon and Wilson many years before

the publication of *The Birds of America.* Wilson, who was then on a tour of the middle-west searching for new birds and soliciting subscriptions, called at the Audubon and Rozier general store in Louisville and was exhibiting sample copies of the first two volumes of his work.

"I felt surprised and gratified at the sight of his volumes," reads Audubon's record of the meeting, "turned over a few of the plates, and had already taken a pen to write my name in his favor, when my partner, rather abruptly, said to me in French, 'My dear Audubon, what induces you to subscribe to this work? Your drawings are certainly far better, and again, you must know as much of the habits of American birds as this gentleman!' Whether Mr. Wilson understood French or not, or if the suddenness with which I paused disappointed him, I cannot tell; but I clearly perceived that he was not pleased. Vanity and the encomiums of my friend prevented me from subscribing. Mr. Wilson asked if I had many drawings of birds. I rose, took down a large portfolio, laid it on the table, and showed him, as I would you, kind reader, or any other person fond of such subjects, the whole contents, and with the same patience with which he had shown me his own drawings. His surprise appeared

great, as he told me he never had the most distant idea that any other individual than himself had been engaged in forming such a collection. He asked me if it was my intention to publish, and when I answered in the negative, his surprise seemed to increase. And, truly, such was not my intention; for until long after, when I met the Prince of Musignano in Philadelphia, I had not the least idea of presenting the fruits of my labors to the world. Mr. Wilson now examined my drawings with care, asked if I should have any objection to lending him a few during his stay, to which I replied that I had none; he then bade me good morning."

Continuing Audubon declared that he introduced Wilson to his wife and friends, took him on hunting trips—on which birds were obtained that Wilson had never seen, and then added: "Thinking that perhaps he (Wilson) might be pleased to publish the results of my researches, I offered them to him, merely on condition that what I had drawn, or might afterwards draw and send to him, should be mentioned in his work as coming from my pencil. I, at the same time offered to open correspondence with him, which I thought might prove beneficial to us both. He made no reply to either proposal, and before many days had elapsed,

left Louisville, on his way to New Orleans, little knowing how much his talents were appreciated in our little town, at least by myself and my friends."

Some years later these two pioneer American ornithologists met a second time, and of this meeting, Audubon wrote: "At length, having occasion to go to Philadelphia, I, immediately after my arrival there, inquired for him (Wilson) and paid him a visit. He was then drawing a White-headed Eagle. He received me with civility and took me to the exhibition rooms of Rembrandt Peale, the artist, who had then portrayed Napoleon crossing the Alps. Mr. Wilson spoke not of birds nor drawings. Feeling as I was forced to do, that my company was not agreeable, I parted from him; and after that I never saw him again. . . ."

Wilson's record of his Louisville visit and his meeting with Audubon—as revealed in as much of his diary as his friend and literary executor, George Ord, sought fit to make public after Wilson's death, follows: "March 17. Take my baggage and grope my way to Louisville—put up at the Indian Queen tavern, and gladly sit down to rest myself.—March 19. Rambling around town with my gun. Examined Mr. ——'s drawings in crayons—very good. Saw two new birds he had, both Motacillae.—March 20. Set out this afternoon

with the gun—killed nothing new. No naturalist to keep me company.—March 21. Went out shooting with Mr. A. Saw number of Sandhill Cranes. Pigeons numerous.—March 23. Packed up my things which I left in care of a merchant here, to be sent on to Lexington; and having parted with great regret, with my paroquet, to the gentleman of the tavern, I bade adieu to Louisville, to which place I had four letters of recommendation, and was taught to expect much of everything there, but neither received one act of civility from those to whom I was recommended, one subscriber, nor one new bird; though I delivered my letters, ransacked the woods repeatedly, and visited all the characters like to subscribe. Science or literature has not one friend in this place."

There is no record of any further comment that Wilson may have made about Audubon—either in his diary or in conversations with Ord or any of his other Philadelphia friends. The diary itself seems to have passed out of existence, and those parts of it that have been preserved were published by Ord in his biographical sketch of Wilson in the ninth volume of the *American Ornithology* which appeared the year after Wilson's death and which was edited by Ord, and, in a later edition of Wilson's work which Ord also edited and

which was published at the same time that the early numbers of Audubon's *Birds of America* were appearing.

That Audubon was aware of the unfriendly attitude of Ord and certain other Philadelphians several years before he began the publication of his own work is evident both from a letter that he wrote from New York to Thomas Sully following his visit to Philadelphia in the summer of 1824, and from an entry made in his journal at this time. In the letter he said: "Should you see Mr. Ord tell him *I* never was his enemy"; while in his journal he wrote: "I have been making inquiries regarding the publication of my drawings in New York; but find that there is little prospect of the undertaking being favorably received. I have reason to suspect that unfriendly communications have been sent to the publishers from Philadelphia by parties interested in Wilson's volume, and who have represented that my drawings have not been wholly done by myself."

2

But as has already been told Audubon went right ahead with his work and was in the very midst of his

London difficulties when his enemies opened fire on him in Philadelphia with the broadside denunciation of him and his rattlesnake paper in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute*. They had already scored a temporary victory by preventing his election to membership in two of Philadelphia's most famous institutions—The American Philosophical Society and The Academy of Natural Sciences, and at the first opportunity Charles Waterton—friend and English correspondent of Ord, and apparently the only person in Great Britain who was actively antagonistic to Audubon, declared in a letter to the London *Magazine of Natural History:* "I myself, with my own eyes, have seen Wilson's original diary, written by him at Louisville; and I have just now on the table before me the account of The Academy of Natural Sciences indignantly rejecting Mr. Audubon as a member, on that diary having been produced to view. . . . Charles Bonaparte, with whom Audubon had 'accidentally formed an acquaintance' (see his introductory address) petitioned The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, that Audubon might be a member. The necessary measures were adopted and Audubon was black-balled. I am aware that he has since been elected: but thereby hangs a tale. Will the reverend eulogist (Waterton is here referring

to the Rev. John Bachman) have the goodness to enquire why that respectable and learned society of gentleman deemed it incumbent upon them to refuse the application of Charles Bonaparte."

Waterton continued his attacks on Audubon and his veracity at every opportunity, and not only resented his very presence in England but seemed to be unconsolably peeved at the honors bestowed upon the American by the Scotch and English scientific societies.

"Without leaving behind him in America any public reputation as a naturalist," he wrote on one occasion, "Mr. Audubon comes to England, and he is immediately pointed out to us as an ornithological luminary of the first magnitude. Strange it is, that he who had been under such a cloud of dense obscurity in his own western latitude should have broken out so suddenly into such dazzling radiance, the moment he approached our eastern island. I ask, what production of Mr. Audubon's is it that has called forth such rapturous applause from our naturalists, who, not content with their own prostration, would fain persuade the public to bow submissively to the stranger."

He denounced Audubon's "Account of the Habits of the Turkey Buzzard—Particularly With the View of Exploding the Opinion Generally Entertained of Its

Extraordinary Powers of Smelling," as being entirely at variance with what he said he knew were the facts about the turkey buzzard. Whereupon Dr. Bachman and a group of disinterested scientists promptly began a series of exhaustive experiments to determine whether Audubon was right or wrong; finally concluded that he was right, and the results of their findings were published in American and English scientific journals. On still another occasion Waterton even went so far as to declare that Audubon could not have been the real author of the *Ornithological Biographies*. In a letter to the *Magazine of Natural History*, he said: "In fine the whole work, from beginning to end, bears evident and undeniable marks of being the product of one pen. One hand alone has directed that pen. Has this hand been that of the reputed author?—No. His former application to get his book written for him shows how fearfully he must have mistrusted his own way of writing, while the faulty paper on the Vútur Aúra proves its worthlessness. I request the English reader to weigh well in his own mind what I have stated; and I flatter myself that he will agree with me, when I affirm that the correct and elegant style of composition which appears throughout the whole of the Biography of Birds (volume one of Audubon's *Ornithological Biographies*)

cannot possibly be that of him whose name it bears; we have undoubted facts to prove that it is far beyond the reach of Audubon."

To Waterton's statement that he possessed "undeniable proof that when Mr. Audubon was in England, he did actually apply to a gentleman to write his history of the birds for him," Victor Audubon replied that he had the authority of that "gentleman"—who later proved to be William Swainson, the English naturalist —for refuting Waterton's charges. Then Waterton retorted by quoting the following statement which he said had been made to him by George Ord: "The reason why Swainson did not write the work as told me by himself, was, that Audubon insisted upon his name being given to the world as the Author! Mr. Swainson, upon this, very properly declined having anything to do with the affair." But Mr. Swainson's version of the affair was quite different from Messrs. Waterton and Ord's, for in replying to their charges he wrote: "My name having been introduced, very unnecessarily, in your last number, I am called upon to rectify the misstatement, no doubt unintentional of Mr. Ord. In reply to the questions and enquiries of that gentleman, regarding the assistance it was expected I should have given to my friend Mr. Audubon, in the *scientific* details of his

work, my reply was, that the negotiations had been broken off from an unwillingness that my name should be printed in the title page. I was not asked to write the work, nor did Mr. Audubon 'insist upon his name being given to the world as the author' of such parts as he wished me to undertake. The query (on the style of the original manuscript) may be briefly answered. I have read Mr. Audubon's original manuscripts, and I have read Mr. Waterton's original manuscripts; and both before they were published. I think the English of one is as good as the English of the other; but here the comparison ends. What all this has to do with a question regarding the smell of vultures, I must leave your readers to find out."

In the end, Waterton and Ord's campaign against Audubon in England—granting that they sincerely believed all that they charged—netted them nothing, for there is no evidence that Audubon's personal standing, or his reputation as an artist or ornithologist, were at all seriously effected. *The New Philosophical Journal* of Edinburgh, in a review of his *Birds of America* and his *Ornithological Biographies*, declared: "We speak of Audubon as one whom we knew. We have not only examined his works with attention but have seen the original drawings and manuscripts from which they

were prepared for the public eye; and whatever others may have said we know that he is undoubtedly the author of all that he claims the authorship. Like all remarkable men Mr. Audubon has had his share of vituperation; but the time will be, although it cannot benefit him, when his works will be referred to as among the most perfect productions of our times. He will then sleep with the illustrious of bygone ages, and the glory of his name will not awaken a thrill of delight in his heart, which will have long ceased to be agitated by the feelings and passions that man must experience in his pilgrimage through life."

The *London Athenæum* in one of a number of highly complimentary articles about Audubon and his work, said: "The long and laborious course of observations which Mr. Audubon has followed even from childhood, has stored his mind with much that is new and curious, and he has told us what he has seen and undergone, not perhaps in the smooth and nicely balanced periods of a drawing room writer, who hopes to give his nothings a substance, by wrapping them up in rose leaves, but with unstudied freedom, rising at times to natural eloquence." And long after Audubon had completed his labors in England and Scotland and returned to America, the *Edinburgh Review* said that "so widely

have his merits been appreciated, that there is now almost no one in this country to whom his name has not, in some measure, become known."

And if Waterton was still reading the reports of the meetings of The Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences as late as 1851 he was probably vexed virtually to the point of speechlessness when he observed that "this Society has heard with profound regret of the death of their esteemed and venerable colleague John James Audubon. . . . That by the demise of this truly great man, Science has lost one of her most zealous and gifted disciples, and the Arts, a Master in the branch which he cultivated," and, "That we recognize in Mr. Audubon a man who has happily lived to fulfill his destiny as an explorer of the great field of American Zoology, while the splendid volumes which are the fruits of his labors, will diffuse the knowledge and love of science to the latest generations."

3

Nor were the anti-Audubon forces in America, and particularly in Philadelphia, any more successful in the long run than Charles Waterton had been in his British campaign. For Audubon's friends—and especially his

Philadelphia friends, had been every bit as active as his enemies, and decidedly more successful. Before the second volume of his *Birds of America* had appeared he had been triumphantly elected to membership in both The Academy of Natural Sciences and The American Philosophical Society, and had received a subscription for his great work from each of these societies.

One of his most ardent supporters in Philadelphia was G. W. Featherstonehaugh, a geologist, who made public what he avowed was a "true history" of the anti-Audubon conspiracy. In an article in the *Monthly American Journal of Geology and Natural Science*, which he was then publishing in Philadelphia, Featherstonehaugh said: "The transaction (Audubon's failure to be elected to membership in certain Philadelphia societies when his name was first proposed) grew out of the spirit of jealousy, which is always illiberal, and the frequent parent of misrepresentation and calumny. Some of the friends of Wilson did not view, with the most cordial spirit, those evidences of transcendent merit, which others willingly accorded to Audubon's drawings. Then arose the spirit of party, and its malevolence. A few small minds, who knew little or nothing of nature, and who had officiously intruded themselves into this matter, endeavored to make up for their want

of knowledge on the subject, by excess of bad zeal. Opinions were industriously circulated that Audubon had in many instances, attempted to impose upon the credulity of the world, by inventing stories which had no foundation in truth, because they were contrary to the known habits of the animals concerned; as if the habits of the animals of this vast continent, could possibly be known to any other class of men but that adventurous one, which like Audubon, had passed their whole lives in observing them; and because he had executed a drawing of inimitable force and beauty, of 'mocking birds defending their nest from a rattlesnake' —a picture which cannot be contemplated without the liveliest emotions, and of which one of the best judges in Europe, Mr. Swainson, in an elegant encomium, has said 'every part of the story is told with exquisite feeling'; they selected this to exercise their detraction upon; and concluding, because the books of systematic naturalists, had not mentioned this habit of the rattlesnake of climbing up bushes, that it was a fair presumption the animal did not and could not climb; they industrially circulated a report that he had imposed a deliberate lie upon the world, and that no doubt he had done so in many other instances. Thus overwhelmed with calumny, and absent, his friends—and he had a few,

both true and steady—had the mortification to witness the temporary success of this bad combination, and see the name of the great naturalist, that would do honor to any society, rejected, and in scornful manner. It is painful to allude to this circumstance, which is somewhat notorious, but that the shame, which belongs to a very few, may not be imputed to all, we have here given a true history of the conspiracy, got up to utterly break down and ruin the reputation of one of the most remarkable men America has produced. . . ."

One of the most bitterly fought over bones of contention in this famous Audubon-Wilson rivalry has, in the light of all the years that have intervened, taken on a somewhat humorous aspect. In the fifth volume of his *Ornithological Biographies* Audubon made the charge that Alexander Wilson during his Louisville visit copied one of Audubon's drawings—the picture of what Audubon called the "Small-headed Flycatcher"—and that Wilson used the copy in his *American Ornithology* without acknowledging the privilege which Audubon said he accorded him. Whereupon Ord appeared before a meeting of The American Philosophical Society and denied Audubon's charge by reading that portion of Wilson's diary which stated that he "did not get one new bird at Louisville," and by de-

claring that he, Ord, was with Wilson when the latter shot the "Small-headed Flycatcher" from which he made the drawing for his book. Ord also read a letter written by Alexander Lawson, the Philadelphia engraver who made the plates for Wilson's *Ornithology*, stating that when Wilson delivered to him the original drawing of the "Small-headed Flycatcher" he also gave him the dead bird thinking that it might be helpful in making the engraving.

Now the humorous part of these once serious charges is that the bird itself seems to have completely disappeared, for from the day that Audubon shot *his* "Small-headed Flycatcher" in Kentucky, and Wilson shot *his* specimen near Philadelphia, there has been no well authenticated case of any other American ornithologist ever having made the unquestioned acquaintance of this much disputed bird, and it is Dr. Herrick's opinion [1] that "it was simply a case of mistaken identity, and both Wilson and Audubon were wrong, each having had in hand and mind an immature representative of one of our numerous Warblers, which are now so much better known."

At this same meeting Ord also charged Audubon with copying a female March Black Bird and a Male

[1] *Audubon the Naturalist.*

Mississippi Kite from Wilson's *Ornithology* and using the copies in his own *Birds of America* "without the least acknowledgment of the source whence they have been derived." But the Philosophical Society took no action in the matter and nothing came of the charges—just as little or no attention was paid to Audubon's charges that he had supplied Wilson with some specific information about the Whooping Crane which Wilson had used without acknowledging his obligations to Audubon.

4

Fortunately, Alexander Wilson's accomplishments were both sufficient and substantial enough for his fame to survive unscathed the unfortunate chain of circumstances that grew so largely out of the fact that his most ardent disciples mistook his successor for a rival, and, the further fact that George Ord, his literary executor, was by temperament about as poorly equipped to meet the rising genius of John James Audubon as any human being that Wilson could possibly have selected for that important post. Ord, according to Dr. Witmer Stone,[1] was what was then known in the scientific world as an

[1] *Leading American Men of Science.*

"exact closet-naturalist," whereas Audubon "loathed the science of the museums and his knowledge of birds was what he derived from close association with them in the forest"; while Frank L. Burns, another biographical authority on Wilson's literary executor, has declared [1] that Ord, while "admirable in many ways was insanely intolerant of any opposition," and quotes Malvina Lawson, the daughter of Wilson's and Ord's engraver, who knew Ord personally, as saying: "Ord was a very singular person, very excitable, almost of pure nervous temperament. Proud, shy and reserved toward strangers; but expansive and brilliant with his friends. . . . In his moral character and his business relations he was one of the most upright of men. He had many excellent qualities, was a strong partisan and was charming in conversation when it pleased him to be so. . . . He particularly detested children and fear of intruding on him accompanied me all my life. He would get into a temper of rage at times. Father, who valued his good qualities, never very steadily opposed him, but my mother had many arguments with him. I have seen him snatch up his hat and rush out of the house, declaring he would never enter it again, and the next Sunday he would walk in to tea as usual as if nothing had hap-

[1] *The Auk*, July, 1917.

pened. . . . He was very much respected but not very much loved. He would often speak very rudely to gentlemen, and more than once father was consulted as to whether Mr. Ord should receive a challenge for what he said, but father was always a peace maker. Toward the close of his life he did some queer things. He must have destroyed the likeness of himself that his son painted and also the plates that my father engraved for his proposed work on animals (quadrupeds); nothing of the kind was found among his effects and not a line of the descriptions I know he had written. He dropped his work on a reverse of fortune; having lost heavily in railroads. . . . To his other oddities he added the last whim of leaving all he died possessed of, about $40,000, to the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane, although he had nephews and nieces in very limited circumstances. Toward the close of his life he shut himself out entirely from the world, living with his books. He had lost most of his old friends and made no new ones. . . ."

Truly a tragic and pathetic figure, and it would be difficult indeed to find a more fitting benediction to the recital of these none too pleasant but quite essential facts, than was uttered by Audubon himself when he wrote in the Introduction to the final volume of his

Ornithological Biographies—"I have pleasure in saying that my enemies have been few, and my friends numerous. May the God who granted me life, industry and perseverance to accomplish my task, forgive the former, and forever bless the latter."

CHAPTER XXI

A PRODIGIOUS WORKER

I

IN the opinion of most of the people who knew him in his would-be merchant days in Louisville and Henderson, John James Audubon probably did not rank very much higher than the traditional small-town loafer. And judged by his indifference to, and his neglect of, his commercial enterprises—which constituted the most obvious side of his nature at that time—it is not at all surprising that the majority of his fellow-townsmen in those two Kentucky communities not only completely misunderstood him but failed utterly to appreciate the fact that potentially he was a prodigious worker and quite capable, as he later proved, of setting a pace that even the most active and energetic of present-day Americans would have difficulty in keeping up with. Thomas A. Edison, with his three or four hours of sleep and his eighteen or twenty hours of work a day, would have been a good team-mate for Audubon, but

the average high-pressure worker of the Twentieth century would quickly have been far outdistanced by the American Woodsman.

In the twenty-five years of intense and never-ceasing activity that followed his departure down the Ohio from Cincinnati, Audubon worked like a veritable Trojan—travelling and hunting, drawing and painting, writing and selling, until at times it seemed as though he would drop from sheer mental and physical exhaustion. And all the while he was driven on by the fearful obsession that he might not live to complete the program of accomplishment that he had set for himself.

2

"He rises with the earliest dawn," wrote Dr. Bachman who had many opportunities to observe Audubon and his methods of work, "and devotes the whole of the day, in intense industry, to his favorite pursuit. The specimens from which he makes his drawings are all from nature; carefully noting the colors of the eye, bill, and legs; measuring with great accuracy, every part of the body. Where differences exist, either in the sexes or young, several figures are given in the same plate;

sparing no labor in retouching old drawings or in making new ones, in all cases where he conceives there may be an improvement. In this way, he has already succeeded in figuring nearly the whole of the birds necessary to complete his splendid and important work. He keeps a journal, and regularly notes down everything connected with natural history. This journal is always kept in English; a language, which, it must be acknowledged, he writes very correctly, when it is taken into consideration that he spent nearly the first seventeen years of his life in France. Besides this, he keeps separate journals, in which he notes everything that he learns each day on the habits of every bird. In all his travels, he carries these journals with him; and he never suffers business, fatigue or pleasure to prevent him each evening from noting down every interesting observation."

3

Audubon himself gives an excellent example not only of his capacity for intense and sustained work but of his "infinite capacity for taking pains," in the entry in his journal for August 25, 1821. He was working in Louisiana at the time, and the temperature and general cli-

matic conditions in Louisiana in late August are not, in themselves, exactly conducive to exacting and long-continued labor.

"Finished drawing a very fine specimen of rattlesnake," he wrote on this particular occasion, "which measured five feet and seven inches, weighed six and a quarter pounds, and had ten rattles. Anxious to give it a position most interesting to a naturalist, I put it in that which the reptile commonly takes when on the point of striking madly with its fangs. I had examined many before, and especially the position of the fangs along the superior jawbones, but had never seen one showing the whole exposed at the same time; and before this supposed that it was probable that those lying enclosed below the upper one, in most specimens, were to replace the upper one which I thought might drop periodically as the animal changed its skin and rattles. However, on dissection of these from the ligament by which they were attached to the jawbones, I found them strongly and I think permanently fixed there as follows. Two superior, or next to the upper lip (I speak of one side of the jaws only) were well connected at their bases and running parallel their whole length, with apertures on the upper and lower sides of their bases to receive the poison connectedly, and the discharging one

a short distance from the sharp point on the inner part of the fangs. The next two fangs, about a quarter of an inch below, connected and received in the same manner, but with only one base aperture on the lower side of each, and the one at the point which issues the poison to the wound. The fifth, rather smaller, is also about a quarter of an inch below. The scales of the belly, to the under part of the mouth, numbered one-hundred and seventy, and twenty-two from the vent to the tail. The heat of the weather was so great that I could devote only sixteen hours to the drawing."

"I painted all day," reads a characteristic entry in one of his Edinburgh journals, "that is, during all the time I could see, and I was up at six o'clock this morning writing by candle-light." And the record of his activities the very next day ends with, "We sat down to supper at eleven—everything magnificent; but I was greatly fatigued, for I had been at work since before five this morning, either painting or writing or thinking hard. We left the table about one, and I was glad to come home. I shall now soon be asleep." And similar entries are the rule rather than the exception throughout all his journals—"I am working on a fox. I take one neatly killed, put him up with wires, and when satisfied with the truth of the position, I take my palette and work as

rapidly as possible; the same with my birds. If practicable, I finish the bird at one sitting—often, it is true, of fourteen hours—so that I think they are correct, both in detail and composition. . . . I rose this morning two and a half hours before day, and wrote much before breakfast. . . . I do with four hours' sleep, keep up a great correspondence, keep up my journal, and write many hours on the letter-press for my *Birds* which is about done. . . . Was at work at half past three, but disagreeable indeed is my situation during bad weather" —written aboard ship during his visit to Labrador— "The rain falls on my drawing paper despite all I can do, and even the fog collects and falls in large drops from the rigging on my table; now and then I am obliged to close my skylight, and then may be said to work almost in darkness."

And as late as 1841—he was then past his fifty-sixth birthday and much older physically than his years indicated—he wrote [1] to a friend: "I have not had time to answer your interesting favor of the 21st., until this morning, being now constantly engaged in the figuring &c of the Quadrupeds of our country; by which I mean that I actually work from daylight every day until I retire to my necessary repose at night."

[1] *The Auk*, April, 1906.

4

To gather the material for his *Birds of America* and his *Ornithological Biographies*, and to complete the publication and sale of these monumental works, including the financing of the whole proposition, Audubon travelled between 30,000 and 35,000 miles—and in those days travelling was not the comparatively easy and luxurious experience that it is today; drew and colored to life, and to the minutest detail, more than 1,000 birds representing close to 500 species; and wrote nearly 1,000,000 words of text. All of which was in addition to the time and labor he spent on his voluminous journals, the hundreds of portraits he made, and the scores of bird and animal pictures he painted to help defray his expenses and to partially repay his many friends who entertained him so extensively both in Europe and America. Surely his erstwhile fellow citizens in Henderson and Louisville would have laughed to scorn the merest suggestion that the young John James Audubon that they knew—and who apparently hadn't enough steadiness and earnestness of purpose even to make a success of a small country store—would ever have had it in him to project and successfully complete such a Herculanean task.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FAITH THAT MOVES MOUNTAINS

I

THE Fates that seem to rule so largely over some men's lives—and so meagrely over others—were more than generous with John James Audubon, for in addition to all the other talents that they bestowed upon him, they also endowed him with a sublime faith in himself. Not such a mean and narrow minded egoism as might have caused him to aspire to a selfishly acquisitive domination over his fellow men, but rather an unswerving and unfaltering belief that the chief reason for his existence was that he might give to the world a clearer and fuller appreciation of the beauties and the wonders of Nature. In brief, Audubon unquestionably believed that he was an inspired man—and inspired by the same Omnipotent Power that he believed was responsible for the creation of Nature.

One may, of course, fairly question the rationalness of Audubon's belief, and one may be fully convinced

that his theory of life was thoroughly irrational. But that does not in the least alter the fact of Audubon's understanding of himself and his relationship to the world, or the further fact that out of his belief came that supreme faith in himself which, more than anything else, made it possible for him to keep driving ahead even when he was confronted by mountainous obstacles and there did not seem to be the smallest chance of his reaching his goal.

2

At heart Audubon was a deeply religious man, but as one of his friends once declared, "he knew nothing of the theology of the schools, and cared as little for it, because the untaught theology of the woods had filled his mind with a nobler sense of God than the schoolmen had ever dreamed." And since there was about him no suggestion of sanctimonious unctuousness he made no conscious proclamations of his mission. But one's sense of perception would indeed be dull who could read the man's journals and letters—especially those written during the darkest days of his trials and tribulations, without becoming fully convinced that John James Au-

dubon believed that a sustaining Power more potent than any of the forces that resided within himself, had destined him to do those things for which he found himself equipped, and that in some way that Power would see him through to a triumphant consummation of his objective. And so, inspired or deluded—one cannot but wonder at times whether there really is much difference between the two words—Audubon met each new disaster that confronted him with unfailing serenity, and faced each new obstacle that loomed in his pathway with undiminished fortitude.

"For more than half a century," said Parke Godwin [1] in words that, eulogistic though they are, are borne out in every particular by the unvarnished facts of Audubon's life, "he followed with almost religious devotion a beautiful and elevated pursuit, enlarging its boundaries by his discoveries, and illustrating its objects by his art. In all climates and in all weathers, scorched by the tropic suns and frozen by the arctic colds; now diving fearlessly into the densest forests and now wandering alone over desolate prairies, far beyond the haunts of civilization, and frequented only by savage beasts or more savage men; in perils, in difficulties and in doubt; listening

[1] Commemorative Addresses.

only to the music of the birds and the lofty inspiration of his own thoughts, he kept for a life time on an original path, which to some seemed chimerical and to others utterly useless, until in the later years and the fading twilight of his days his efforts were crowned with success. The records of man's endeavor contain few nobler examples of strength of purpose and indefatigable zeal."

And, declared another of his contemporaries, Thomas M. Brewer,[1] who also had an intimate knowledge of the bitter experiences that came to Audubon in the course of his years of struggling: "Loss of property, the destruction of his drawings involving years of research and toil, with various other disappointments and disasters that would have overwhelmed any one else with despair, or driven him from his purpose, were all met by Audubon with a serenity that knew no defeat, and with only an added desire and determination to persevere, and to overcome all obstacles, and to make all their losses good. The calm and uncomplaining fortitude with which Audubon received and endured the disastrous results of the panic of 1837 when nearly half of all his subscribers to his great work, having

[1] *Harper's Magazine*, May, 1880.

become either bankrupt or impoverished, withdrew their subscriptions, exhibited all the attributes of the most sublime heroism."

3

In a letter to his friend Thomas Sully[1] who had written to inform him of the attacks that his enemies in Philadelphia were making upon him, Audubon said: "I have written with care what I have seen, and have felt a great desire to spread the knowledge I have obtained in the great field of Science for the benefit of the world at large, and I rest content with this motto: '*Le temps découvrira la vérité*' "; and many years afterwards, in writing to the then youthful Spencer Fullerton Baird,[2] he declared: ". . . as for myself I rely as much as I have ever done in the Support of the Almighty Being who has supported and secured me against evils of all sorts in my various undertakings, and with this Idea in my heart, I feel confident that although an Old Man, I could undertake any Journey whatever, and no matter of their length or difficulties. . . ."

[1] *Audubon the Naturalist.*
[2] *The Auk,* January, 1927.

CHAPTER XXIII

FROM THE TROPICS TO THE ARCTIC

I

DURING the twelve years that intervened between the appearance of the first number of his *Birds of America* in 1827 and the final volume of his *Ornithological Biographies* in 1839, Audubon made three trips to the United States, in the course of which his travels in search of material needed to complete his work, took him from the tropical waters of the Gulf of Mexico to the rock and snow bound coast of Labrador. And between these two extremities he explored virtually every region along the eastern coast of America that he had not previously visited and that gave any promise of furnishing him with new birds and new ornithological adventures.

From what he called his "permanent lodgings" in the then country village of Camden, New Jersey, whither he had gone soon after his arrival in New York in the spring of 1829—"for the purpose of

watching the passage of certain warblers on their way north early in the month of May"—he made extended excursions into the "great pine forest" of Northumberland county, in Pennsylvania, and along the South Jersey coast, particularly in the neighborhood of Great Egg Harbor—a locality, incidentally, that is still a favorite haunt of ornithologists.

"I am at work and have done much, but I wish I had eight pairs of hands, and another body to shoot the specimens," he wrote in his Camden journal under date of October 11, 1829. "Still I am delighted at what I have accumulated in drawings this season. Forty-two drawings in four months, eleven large, eleven middle size, and twenty-two small, comprising ninety-five birds, from Eagles downward, with plants, nests, flowers and sixty different kinds of eggs. I live alone, see scarcely anyone, beside those belonging to the home where I lodge. I rise long before day and work till night fall, when I take a walk, and to bed . . . after all, there is nothing perfect but primitiveness and my efforts at copying nature, like all things attempted by us poor mortals, fall far short of the originals. Few better than myself can appreciate this with more despondency than I do."

2

"We left Richmond this morning in a stage well crammed with Italian musicians and southern merchants," reads his record of one of his trips into the South. "Arrived at Petersburg at a late hour, dined, and were again crammed in a car drawn by a locomotive, which dragged us twelve miles an hour, and sent out sparks of fire enough to keep us constantly busy in extinguishing them on our clothes. At Blakely we were again crammed into a stage, and dragged about two miles an hour. We crossed the Roanoke River by torchlight in a flatboat, passed through Halifax, Raleigh, Fayetteville and Columbia, where we spent the night. . . ."

Considerable time was spent in and around Charleston, South Carolina, where Audubon made his home with his friend and fellow naturalist, the Rev. John Bachman. In Florida he explored the St. John's River and the bays, inlets and islands along the then almost uninhabited east coast of the state all the way down the peninsula to the very tip end of the Keys; revelled in the myriads of tropical and semi-tropical birds that he

found wherever he went—pelicans, cormorants, flamingos, rose-colored curlews, purple herons and white ibis; and was befriended and assisted by United States Government officials, planters, foresters, Seminole Indians, fishermen, turtlers and some of the most notorious of the "Florida wreckers"—whose ostensible business it was to salvage ships that were accidentally wrecked on the Florida reefs but who were often suspected of luring the vessels onto the reefs by deceptive lights in order that they might plunder the cargos and rob the passengers and crews.

In the summer of 1833 he chartered the schooner *Ripley* of Eastport, Maine, and with his son John and five young New England naturalists—Dr. George Shattuck, Thomas Lincoln, William Ingalls and Joseph Coolidge, as his assistants, he journeyed up to Labrador where he spent three months studying bird life, gathering ornithological specimens and adding to his collection of drawings; and later he and his son John and his good friend Edward Harris, a wealthy young naturalist of Moorestown, New Jersey, made a trip to the Gulf of Mexico and along the coast of Texas.

3

No longer under that "cloud of dense obscurity" that had been so irritating to Charles Waterton, Audubon was rapidly becoming known from one end of the country to the other, and his fame was growing accordingly. Washington Irving, Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, and a group of prominent Bostonians—including Dr. George Parkman, Dr. George C. Shattuck, Colonel Thomas H. Perkins and Josiah Quincy, were among his most ardent friends and champions. President Andrew Jackson entertained him at dinner at the White House and that night he wrote in his journal: "The dinner was what might be called plain and substantial in England; I dined from a fine young turkey, shot within twenty miles of Washington. The General drank no wine, but his health was drunk by us more than once; and he ate very moderately, his last dish consisting of bread and milk. . . ."

To President-elect Martin Van Buren, Audubon was introduced by Washington Irving as "our distinguished and most meritorious countryman"; the newspapers chronicled his every activity in their news columns and

praised him and his work in their editorials, and the Federal and State Governments did everything in their power to aid and facilitate him on his various expeditions.

Even the annoyance and embarrassment attendant upon his arrest in Philadelphia and the institution of a suit against him in Charleston—both actions being echoes of some of his early business troubles in the West, and soon settled—were quickly forgotten in the elation that came to him as he saw his triumph growing and his great task nearing completion and success.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MASTER SALESMAN

I

IN the end it was Audubon the Salesman who saved Audubon the Naturalist, and Audubon the Artist, from what would undoubtedly have been the American Woodsman's final and extinguishing disaster. For in undertaking to be his own publisher—and that was the *only* way he could get his birds published in life size, for no regular publisher considered his proposition at all practical—he virtually set for himself the task of raising himself by his own boot straps. In other words, with no capital to begin with, and no outside assistance to fall back on—for even his best friends did not have enough faith in his project to finance it or underwrite it for him—he was compelled to sell *The Birds of America* to get the money to pay the cost of publishing *The Birds of America;* and if he had been anything less than the master salesman that he was the great book would have failed before the first volume was anywhere near completed, the *Ornithological*

Biographies would never have been born, Audubon himself would in all probability have landed in a debtor's cell, and his affairs would have become so hopelessly tangled and his dreams so utterly shattered that he would never have recovered sufficiently—either physically or spiritually—to have ever again attempted the realization of any kind of an ambition.

But it so happened that John James Audubon had every basic requisite of a real salesman. He believed in himself, he believed in his "goods," and he knew what he was talking about when he was soliciting a sale. Moreover, he had unlimited determination, relentless perseverance, enthusiasm without end, and a most ingratiating manner. Doubtless he was both gifted and favored by the gods, but the very fact that he possessed these qualities, and, incidentally, retained them in the face of the most discouraging experiences, is highly important in helping to explain his extraordinary success.

2

Just how successful a salesman Audubon was, may, perhaps, best be judged by the fact that the cost of

publishing *The Birds of America* was approximately $100,000—a vast sum indeed in the 1820's and 30's—and that with the exception of the comparatively small amount of money that came to him through the sale of some of his original paintings in London and Edinburgh—important though those sales were in their timeliness—he not only paid all this publishing expense out of the receipts from his sales of the great book itself, but all his living and travelling expenses during the twelve years that the work was in the course of publication; financed his *Ornithological Biographies*—which he also published himself because no regular publisher believed they would succeed; and still had something left over toward the beginning of the re-establishment of his home in America. And a few years later he was the chief salesman of the first octavo edition of the *Birds*—a seven volume combination of lithographic reductions of the large plates, and the text of the *Biographies*—of which more than 1,000 sets were sold at $100 per set.

According to Audubon's own figures, he sold a total of 165 complete sets of the famous original edition of *The Birds of America*—82 in the United States, at $1,000 per set; and 83 in England, Scotland and France, at £182, 14s. per set. The big book was issued

serially, in 87 parts, and sold originally for two guineas per part, payable on delivery; and most of the sets were paid for in this manner, although some of the purchasers, appreciating the struggle that Audubon the Salesman was making to keep sufficiently ahead of Audubon the Publisher to avoid unpleasant acquaintances with the Sheriff—who was never so very far in the rear of the race—paid for their copies in advance payments of several hundred dollars each, or the English or French equivalent thereof. To use a familiar present-day aphorism, he made most of his sales on "direct solicitation"; his specific selling trips taking him to Paris, and the principal cities of England, Scotland and the eastern half of the United States. Sometimes he called on prospective purchasers in their home and offices, and sometimes he entertained them at his lodgings where he held impromptu exhibitions of some of his original paintings and some of the proofs from his mammoth book.

From the day Lizars, the Edinburgh engraver, began work on the first engraving for the first number of the *Birds*, to the day nearly twelve years later when Havell, the London engraver, handed him a proof of the final engraving for the last number, Audubon —with all his other problems, and all his necessary

social obligations, never for one moment forgot that he was a salesman, and that the successful termination of all his years of work as a naturalist and artist, depended on his ability to sell the finished product of that labor. He took his "sample case" and his "order book"—his enormous portfolio of engravers' proofs and original paintings, and his "Book of Subscriptions"—with him wherever he went, and frequently secured subscribers when he least expected to. On one occasion he made a sale to a wealthy fellow passenger on the ship on which they were crossing the Atlantic, and once, while exploring the coast between Charleston and Key West, he went ashore on an island in search of new birds, accidentally met the gentleman who happened to own the island, presented his card, was entertained at dinner, told about his work and his book, and came away with the gentleman's signature "on the dotted line."

3

Today, money is spent much more freely than it was in Audubon's time, and salesmanship has been perfected to a degree that has made it something very like an exact science. But with all the resources that modern

salesmanship now has at its command for "breaking down sales resistance," One Thousand Dollar sales—as a rule—still involve considerable work on the part of the salesmen who make them, and are rarely to be had merely for the asking. So one can but wonder how many of today's most efficient salesmen could have sold *The Birds of America*—particularly under the conditions and circumstances that Audubon was compelled to work—and achieved anything like the success that he attained, to say nothing of financing the $100,000 manufacturing costs as they went along.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WONDER OF THE PUBLISHING WORLD

I

ONE of the few things that John James Audubon really feared was the possibility that he might die without leaving what he once characterized as a "landmark" of his existence. But this, like most human fears, was quite groundless, for there never has been, and probably never will be, another book that is at all comparable with the original double elephant folio edition of *The Birds of America;* and while one copy of this work remains—in actuality or in the memory of man, there will be no possibility of this most amazing "landmark" of John James Audubon's existence ever being effaced from the records of civilization.

Nearly a century has passed since the publication of the gigantic work was completed, but it still ranks as one of the great wonders of the publishing world, and still stands as "the most magnificent monument which

has yet been erected to ornithology." It consists of four enormous volumes,[1] each volume—with some slight variations in the different sets, depending on the extent to which the pages have been trimmed in binding—being approximately 3 feet 3 inches high, 2 feet 5 inches wide, 3 inches thick, and weighing between 40 and 45 pounds. In the four volumes there are 435 hand engraved and hand colored copperplate reproductions of 1,065 life-size figures of what Audubon believed were 489 distinct species of American birds—and in only a few instances have ornithologists since discovered errors in his identifications of the numerous species. The work contains no text except the title page and the titles under the illustrations.

To fully appreciate the magnitude of the job of manufacturing *The Birds of America*, it must be remembered that in those days modern photo-engraving and color printing—those commonplace miracles of today—were undreamed of arts. Every illustration in Audubon's great book was first engraved by hand on a copper plate; in other words, the engraver, copied each original picture, in every detail, by etching or cutting lines on a piece of sheet copper—Havell, in particular, attaining marked artistic results, and to a limited extent

[1] In a few instances the plates have been bound in five volumes.

facilitating his work, by the use of what was then known as the "aquatint process," which was a method of doing certain parts of the engraving by cutting into the copper plate by the application of various chemicals. From these copper engravings were printed what is known as "black and white" reproductions. Then each reproduction—that is, each impression printed from an engraving on a hand press—had to be colored in water color paints, by hand and exactly like the original painting. Some idea of the high character of the skill required, and the vast amount of labor involved in the engraving, printing and coloring of *The Birds of America* may be had from these few facts: the figures of the larger birds—the wild turkeys, the eagles, and the vultures, etc., each required more than five square feet of copper plate; the studies of the smaller birds each contained from two to a half dozen figures—male, female and young; and the hundreds of plants, flowers and insects shown in the illustrations had to be as carefully engraved as the birds themselves; while each one of the 100,000 black and white impressions printed from the copper engravings had to be colored by hand in every particular and in exact accordance with the original paintings. The work of coloring the plates was a huge job in itself and at times required the services

of as many as 50 expert colorers. Any one who has ever seen a modern color press printing anywhere from two to six colors in a single operation will thoroughly appreciate the stupendous amount of work that went into the coloring of the pages in *The Birds of America.*

To Lizars, the Edinburgh engraver, who had the courage to begin the work, and, to a much larger extent, to Robert Havell Jr., the London engraver, who carried the book to its completion, Audubon was deeply indebted for much of the great success that his work finally attained. In all, Havell personally engraved 425 of the 435 plates in the book, did some additional work on the first ten plates made by Lizars, and, when his father died a few years after they began work on the Audubon book, he had full charge of the printing and coloring as well as the engraving.

2

Of the approximately 170 complete sets of *The Birds of America* published in the original double elephant folio edition—and there never was a second edition in this size—not more than 120 are believed to be in existence today. A number of sets belonging to sub-

scribers living in Southern states, were destroyed in the Civil War; others have been lost in fires and earthquakes, and some have been "broken up" and the individual plates sold to art collectors and dealers. Of the existing sets about 70 are in the United States and Canada, with the remaining 50 scattered over the world, but mostly in European countries and particularly in England and Scotland. But what is more important than the geographical distribution of these rare books is the fact that 90 of the existing sets are now permanently located in the great libraries and scientific museums of the world where they will be amply protected against fire and always available for examination and study. The comparatively few copies that are still privately owned—probably not more than 30—are rarely offered at public sale. A complete set in good condition is worth anywhere from $6,000 to $10,000, although a New York bookseller recently listed a set at $12,500; the prices varying according to the general condition of the volumes, the beauty of the coloring, and the width of the margins, particularly with respect to the Turkey Plate which is generally regarded as the prize illustration of the whole book. Even individual plates, from broken sets, have acquired a value that would have dumbfounded Audubon; a good speci-

men of the Turkey Cock being worth anywhere from $200 to $2,000, depending, as with the book itself, on the coloring, margins, etc.

Practically all of the original paintings, which are in water colors, have been preserved and now belong to the New York Historical Society which purchased them from Mrs. Audubon a few years after her husband's death. One of the few originals not included in this collection—the California Vulture, Plate 416—is valued at $3,500. The almost equally famous engravings, however, were, for the most part, destined to a tragic end. Circumstances made it necessary for the Audubon family to sell them; eventually they became the property of a smelting company, and finally all but about 50 of them were reduced to copper ingots! According to Ruthven Deane [1]—one of the foremost Audubonian authorities, only 41 of these masterly engravings are in existence today, and 25 of these are in museums, universities and public libraries.

[1] *The Auk*, January, 1927.

CHAPTER XXVI

ARTIST, NATURALIST AND HISTORIAN

I

AS an artist, and particularly as an ornithological artist, Audubon was unquestionably a genius. Even his bitterest enemies and most unfriendly critics have virtually conceded him this distinction. He received less specific instruction in drawing and painting than the average student gets in a two year course in a good art school, and yet he painted birds—not fifty or a hundred of them but literally thousands of them—with such vividness of coloring and action, and with such a keenly sympathetic understanding of their natures, that his work has about it a quality—a curious mixture of realism and emotionalism—that gives it a character wholly its own and typically Audubonian. Granted that some of his birds are posed in "anatomically impossible attitudes," as one authoritative but by no means unfriendly critic once declared—although on this very point Audubon himself said: "The posi-

tions, may, perhaps, in some instances, appear *outré;* but such supposed exaggerations can afford subject of criticism only to persons unacquainted with the feathered tribes; for believe me, nothing can be more transient or varied than the attitudes of birds"; and granted too, that at times Audubon the Artist did take the bit in his teeth and run away with Audubon the Ornithologist, and also, that there have been other artists whose work, in some instances, has, from a purely artistic standpoint been more nearly perfect, or, from a purely scientific viewpoint more nearly accurate—granted all these things and more, and the work of Audubon the Artist still stands supreme because it does have about it that scintillating aliveness that comes into being only at the touch of a true genius.

2

From the strictly scientific viewpoint—that is, as compared with such men as Humboldt, Agassiz and Darwin—Audubon was not, of course, a true naturalist. But the folly of such a statement, were it made simply as derogatory criticism—as has sometimes happened—would be that Audubon himself never pre-

tended that he was a naturalist—in the purely scientific sense of the word. And the best possible evidence that he fully appreciated his limitations in this respect is found in the fact that when he came to write his *Ornithological Biographies*—those dramatic and almost human-like life stories of the birds that he had pictured in *The Birds of America*—he frankly sought and secured the services of William Mac Gillivray the distinguished Scotch naturalist and ornithologist, to assist him in preparing the strictly scientific parts of the text; being scrupulously particular at every opportunity to make clear to the public his indebtedness to his assistant. In the introduction to the first volume of the *Ornithological Biographies*, he wrote: ". . . I feel pleasure in here acknowledging the assistance which I have received from a friend, Mr. William Mac Gillivray, who being possessed of a liberal education, and a strong taste for the study of the Natural Sciences, has aided me, not in drawing the figures of my illustrations, nor in writing the book now in your hand, although fully competent for both tasks, but in completing the scientific details, and in smoothing down the asperities of my *Ornithological Biographies*." Additional acknowledgment of Mac Gillivray's services appears in succeeding volumes, and in the preface to

The Synopsis of the Birds of North America which followed the publication of the *Biographies*, Audubon once more declared: "On this occasion I have again to acknowledge the benefit derived from the aid of my friend Mr. Mac Gillivray, whose general knowledge of ornithology, and perfect candor, have rendered his advice peculiarly valuable."

But if Audubon was not a naturalist in the strict scientific sense of the word, he most assuredly rendered a great service to natural history, for he was one of the keenest and most indefatigable observers, and recorders, of birds and animal life—particularly the former—that the world has ever known; and his *Ornithological Biographies*, in spite of the fact that his strong emotional sense may at times have led him to write more as a dramatist than as a scientific observer of the phenomena of nature, are veritable storehouses of ornithological fact and information that have been of inestimable value to the scientific world—as witness, just by way of a single illustration, the frequent references to Audubon and his findings in *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. And even his tendency, at times, to perhaps over-dramatize the lives and imagined feelings of some of the birds, while it constitutes, in the eyes of the scientific ornithologists,

one of his most serious shortcomings, has been a tremenduous factor in awakening and stimulating a popular interest in, and love of, birds. On this score alone the scientific world, as well as the lay world, owes a vast debt of gratitude to the "American Woodsman," as he rather preferred to call himself.

3

And finally, Audubon was even less of a scientific historian than he was a scientific naturalist, for he paid practically no attention to exact dates, took little or no interest in wars and politics, and had neither the inclination nor the time to research, or sift or analyse all the data that came into his possession. Consequently it is not surprising that some of the statements contained in a few of his narratives, have been criticized as being not entirely authentic. On the whole, however, his writings include no end of valuable and intensely interesting American history, for he knew the primitive wilderness of the Middle West east of the Mississippi during the early years of the Nineteenth century as only a wanderer and roamer can ever know a country, and his journals, his *Ornithological Biog-*

raphies, and his *Episodes*—which he included in the first three volumes of the *Biographies*—abound in graphic thumb-nail sketches that are vividly descriptive of that vast stretch of country as it looked first when the half savage Indians—with whom Audubon was always on the best of terms—began abandoning it and retreating westward before the onward sweep of the white man, and later, when farms and villages had begun to replace the red man's erstwhile hunting grounds and the first crude Ohio and Mississippi river steamboats were supplanting the canoes of the Indians and the fur traders and the picturesque pole-boats, keelboats and barges of the early settlers and the peddling merchants.

Today a hundred busy and populous communities line the banks of the Ohio River from Pittsburg to Cairo, but here is the same great river and the same adjoining countryside—first as it looked in the opening decade of the Nineteenth century, and then as it appeared just twenty years later—as seen by Audubon the Would-be Merchant and recorded by Audubon the Historian, in a brief sample passage from his Episode, *The Ohio:* "When I think of these times, and call back to my mind the grandeur and beauty of those almost uninhabited shores; when I picture to myself the dense

and lofty summits of the forests, that everywhere spread along the hills and overhung the margins of the stream, unmolested by the axe of the settler; when I know how dearly purchased the safe navigation of that river has been, by the blood of many worthy Virginians; when I see that no longer any aborigines are to be found there, and that the vast herds of Elk, Deer, and Buffalo which once pastured on these hills, and in these valleys, making for themselves great roads to the several salt-springs, have ceased to exist; when I reflect that all this grand portion of our Union, instead of being in a state of nature, is now more or less covered with villages, farms and towns, where the din of hammers and machinery is constantly heard; that the woods are fast disappearing under the axe by day, and the fire by night; that hundreds of steamboats are gliding to and fro, over the whole length of the majestic river, forcing commerce to take root and to prosper at every spot; when I see the surplus population of Europe coming to assist in the destruction of the forest, and transplanting civilization into its darkest recesses; when I remember that these extraordinary changes have all taken place in the short period of twenty years, I pause, wonder, and although I know all to be a fact, can scarcely believe its reality."

And with equal vividness and intensity of feeling he wrote of many other sections of pioneer America as he saw them, and knew them, in the days when the United States, as we know it today, comprised not much more than the narrow strip of seacoast that stretches from Boston to Savannah, and only the hardiest and most fearless men and women ventured into the outlying territories.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

I

WITH the completion of *The Birds of America* and the *Ornithological Biographies*, and with the praise of the whole Western World ringing in his ears, Audubon said farewell to Europe and late in the summer of 1839—just thirteen years after his fateful arrival in Liverpool—departed for America. For two years he lived at 86 White Street, New York City—which in those days was quite as far "up-town" as it is "down-town" today; busily engaged throughout this period, and during the following two years, with the preliminary work on *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, and with the publication and sale of a seven volume octavo edition of his first work, which combined small lithographic reproductions of the plates from the big edition of the *Birds* with the text from the *Biographies*. This edition was also issued

serially, in 100 parts, and sold for $1.00 per part. It attained immediate success and in 1841 Audubon purchased a tract of about 30 acres of land fronting on the Hudson River and extending from what is now 155th. Street to 158th. Street, New York City. Here he built his home, which he called *Minniesland* in honor of his wife—"Minnie" being an old Scotch word for "Mother," and the term generally used by Audubon and his sons in addressing Mrs. Audubon—and here he lived during the last years of his life.

In 1843—he was then 58 years old—Audubon and a group of friends, including Edward Harris and John G. Bell, the taxidermist, made an eight months' trip up the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, gathering material for the new book on quadrupeds—the illustrations for which were being made by Audubon and his two talented sons, John and Victor, with the Rev. John Bachman, the noted naturalist-clergyman of Charleston, South Carolina, collaborating in the writing of the text. The first volume of illustrations—each plate being 28 by 22 inches—appeared in 1845, and the second volume, along with the first volume of text, was published the following year.

2

Although he rarely appeared at public gatherings, and since returning from his Missouri River trip had done comparatively little travelling, Audubon was now one of America's most widely known and most highly lauded citizens. Fame and enough money to relieve him from immediate financial worries—and that is as near as he ever got to being a rich man—had at last come to him after all his years of labor and anxiety; and living quietly and comfortably at his woodland home along the Hudson, and surrounded by his family and the innumerable birds that found a ready sanctuary on his grounds, he was just about as happy as it is possible for a human being to be who has had a full and arduous life, and realizes that his days of activity and achievement are at an end.

"I found him," wrote Thomas M. Brewer [1] in recalling his last visit to *Minniesland* in the summer of 1846, "in a retreat well worthy of so true a lover of nature. It was truly a lovely spot, on a well wooded point running out into the river. His dwelling was a

[1] *Harper's Magazine*, May, 1880.

large old-fashioned wooden house, from the veranda of which was a fine view looking both up and down the stream, and around the dwelling were grouped several fine old forest trees of beech and oak. The grounds were well stocked with pets of various kinds, both birds and beasts, while his wild feathered favorites, hardly less confiding, had their nests over his doorway. . . . The patriarch . . . had greatly changed since I had last seen him. He wore his hair longer and it now hung down in snowy whiteness over his shoulders. His once piercing grey eyes, though still bright, had already begun to fail him. He could no longer paint with his wonted accuracy, and had at last, most reluctantly, been forced to surrender to his sons the task of completing the illustrations to his *Quadrupeds of North America*. Surrounded by his large family, including his devoted wife, his two sons, with their wives, and quite a troop of grandchildren, his enjoyment of life seemed to leave him little to desire. He was very fond of the rising generation, and they were as devoted in their affectionate regard for him. He seemed to enjoy to the utmost each moment of his time, content at last to submit to an inevitable and well earned leisure, and to throw upon his gifted sons his uncompleted tasks."

AUDUBON IN THE CLOSING YEARS OF HIS LIFE

From a daguerreotype made by Brady, the famous Civil War photographer, and reproduced through the courtesy of The National Association of Audubon Societies.

3

To Audubon himself Fate was always kind, but through him, in the closing years of his life, it struck a cruel and bitter blow at his family and friends. For the shadow of a great tragedy fell across *Minniesland* and darkened and saddened the hearts of all who were near and dear to the American Woodsman. At first the members of his household noticed only a lessening interest in the everyday affairs that were going on about him, and a seeming difficulty in finding the right word to express himself. But by the close of 1847 it was quite evident that the delicate mechanism of his once brilliant mind, worn thin by his years of consuming worry and exhausting labor, had failed him completely.

"Alas, my poor friend Audubon!" wrote Dr. Bachman after a visit to *Minniesland* in the spring of 1848. "The outlines of his countenance and his form are there, but his noble mind is all in ruins."

The Old Man had returned to his childhood, and with neither pain nor anguish to distress him, and with his beloved wife always at his side to guide his footsteps and minister to his every need, he went quietly and peacefully on to the End—January 27, 1851.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A NAME THAT HAS BECOME A SYMBOL

I

ABOVE the grave of John James Audubon in Trinity Church Cemetery, New York City, not far from his old home on the Hudson, rises a splendid marble monument. In Audubon Park, New Orleans, stands the figure of the American Woodsman cast in imperishable bronze. High above the clouds in Boulder county, Colorado, rises the snow-capped peak of Mt. Audubon. With Washington, Franklin and Lincoln, the name of Audubon was among the first of the great Americans to enter the Hall of Fame. And throughout the length and breadth of the land there are innumerable towns, villages, parks and avenues named in honor of the creator of *The Birds of America.*

But more significant than all of these tributes and memorials—because it comes nearer to the heart of the man himself—is the great Audubon movement for the protection and preservation of the wild bird and

wild animal life of the nation, which, although it was founded thirty-five years after the American Woodsman's death, could not have been more appropriately named. For while Audubon was not, and in the very nature of things could not have been a conservationist in the sense that the word is used today—for in his time wild bird and animal life was abundantly plentiful throughout all America—he clearly foresaw the day when the movement which now bears his name would have to come into being if the wild life of the nation was not to be completely wiped out, for as early as 1826 he wrote in his journal: "A century hence . . . nature will have been robbed of many brilliant charms, the rivers will be tormented and turned astray from their primitive courses, the hills will be levelled with the swamps, and perhaps the swamps will have become a mound surmounted by a fortress of a thousand guns. Scarce a magnolia will Louisiana possess, the timid Deer will exist nowhere, fish will no longer abound in the rivers, the Eagle scarce ever alight, and these millions of lovely songsters be driven away or slain by man."

The original Audubon Society was founded in 1886 by George Bird Grinnell who as a child had been a pupil of Mrs. Audubon after her husband's death, and

who, as an active member of the American Ornithologists' Union was serving on that organization's committee "for the protection of North American birds and their eggs against wanton and indiscriminate destruction"—particularly in connection with the wholesale slaughter of birds for millinery purposes. Aiming to popularize the campaign instituted by the Ornithologists' committee, Dr. Grinnell coined the name "The Audubon Society" and used it for the first time in the February 11, 1886 issue of *Forest and Stream* of which he was then the editor. In an editorial which he called "The Audubon Society," Dr. Grinnell said: "In the first half of this century there lived a man who did more to teach Americans about the birds of their own land than any other who ever lived. His beautiful and spirited paintings and his charming and tender accounts of the habits of his favorites have made him immortal and have inspired his countrymen with an ardent love for the birds. The land which produced the painter-naturalist, John James Audubon, will not willingly see the beautiful forms he loved so well exterminated. We propose the formation of an Association for the protection of wild birds and their eggs, which shall be called The Audubon Society. Its membership is to be free to everyone who is willing to lend a helping hand in

forwarding the objects for which it is formed. These objects shall be to prevent, so far as possible, (1) the killing of any wild birds not used for food; (2) the destruction of nests or eggs of any wild bird, and (3) the wearing of feathers as ornaments or trimming for dress."

Today the Audubon movement consists of thousands of Audubon Societies and other bird and nature clubs, and the total membership runs into hundreds of thousands. At the head of this vast army of men, women and children, is the National Association of Audubon Societies which, under the leadership of its president, Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, has become one of the most potent and valuable conservationist factors in American life. This Association conducts state and federal legislative campaigns for the enactment of laws to protect useful birds and animals, is actively engaged in regulating the plumage trade, has been chiefly instrumental in supressing the traffic in feathers of native birds, and has been largely responsible in breaking up the traffic in live mockingbirds, cardinals and other native song birds, for sale or for shipment abroad as cage birds; assists societies, park commissioners and private persons to form refuges, erect nesting houses, baths and other accommodations for birds, and to feed

the birds in winter; employs a large force of wardens to protect colonies of ducks, gulls, terns, egrets and other water birds; operates thirty large and important bird reservations—including the 26,000 acre Paul J. Rainey Wild Life Sanctuary in Louisiana, and the Roosevelt Bird Sanctuary at Oyster Bay; and through the national headquarters in New York City, the various state headquarters, and the thousands of individual members throughout the country—including a great number of children—conducts a continuous educational campaign to awaken and stimulate not only a popular recreational interest in bird and animal life, but an understanding of the urgent economic necessity of protecting and preserving the wild birds and game animals of the country, and also the valuable non-game bird life. And it was as President of the National Association of Audubon Societies that Dr. Pearson, in 1922, initiated the movement that led to the formation, in London, of The International Committee for Bird Protection.

2

Yes, John James Audubon, you failed in everything that the World told you that you ought to do. Then,

when the World was satisfied that you were worthless, you "turned the tables" on the World and achieved a triumph such as few men have ever realized. And with the passing years you have reached that highest of all goals, for your name has become enshrined in the hearts of men, women, and children the world over, for it has become as a symbol of one of Nature's finest and most beautiful gifts to mankind, and as a shibboleth for the protection and preservation of that gift against the ravages and exploitations of a ruthless and selfish age.

A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY AND A WORD OF THANKS

Frankly, and as fully as space will permit, the author wishes to acknowledge the sources of the bibliographical material used in the making of this book, and, to express his appreciation of the many kindnesses shown him by innumerable persons.

Audubon's own published works include the original editions of *The Birds of America* and the *Ornithological Biographies*—with a number of subsequent editions that combine the plates of the former, in reduced size, with the text of the latter; *A Synopsis of the Birds of North America*—a systematic index to the *Birds* and *Biographies; The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (illustrations exclusively), and *The Quadrupeds of North America* (illustrations and text)—the two latter works being the joint product of Audubon and his two sons, and, the Rev. John Bachman who wrote the major portion of the text. Audubon also wrote a number of magazine articles, practically all of which were published in English and Scotch scientific journals; was a prolific letter-writer, and kept volu-

minous journals, many of which, unfortunately, have been destroyed in fires or otherwise lost.

Note A: *Audubon And His Journals,* by Maria R. Audubon, With Zoological and Other Notes by Elliott Coues, contains, in addition to the European, Labrador and Missouri journals, a brief biography and "Myself"—the only autobiographical sketch that Audubon is known to have written. Quotations from this work are used by special permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons, and include all the autobiographical passages quoted—notably those used in Chapters I, II, III and IV; Audubon's account of his trip from New Orleans to Liverpool in Chapter XV; and all the quotations from his journal record of his experiences in Europe as related in Chapters XVI, XVII, XVIII and XXI, with the exception of the one brief reference to Lord Stanley's criticism of his work, and the two paragraphs telling of his experiences with Sir Thomas Lawrence and in selling pictures in The Strand, London, which are quoted from the work covered by Note B.

Note B: *The Life of John James Audubon, The Naturalist,* Edited by His Widow. Quotations from this work are used by special permission of the publishers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, and include all the passages

in Chapter XI quoted from Audubon's journals; Vincent Nolte's letter to Richard Rathbone, in Chapter XVI; Sir Walter Scott's letter to Audubon, in Chapter XVII; and the Prospectus of *The Birds of America* in Chapter XVIII.

Note C: *Audubon The Naturalist,* by Francis Hobart Herrick. The specific quotations from this work cited in footnotes are used by special permission of the publishers, D. Appleton and Company. But in addition, the author wishes to record his special indebtedness to Dr. Herrick whose researches—as published in his scholarly biography—not only solved the major part of the mystery that for so many years surrounded the birth and parentage of Audubon, but also revealed much new and enlightening data concerning the life and work of the American Woodsman.

Thanks are also due the publishers of the following books and periodicals for permission to use the quoted passages cited either in the text or in footnotes: *Leading American Men of Science,* edited by David Starr Jordan, Henry Holt and Company; *Commemorative Addresses,* by Parke Godwin, and *The Journals of Sir Walter Scott,* Harper & Brothers; *Pioneers of Science in America,* edited by William Jay Youmans, D. Appleton and Company; *The Creoles of Louisiana,* by

George W. Cable, Charles Scribner's Sons; *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft,* by George Gissing, *The Romance of Leonardo Da Vinci,* by Dmitri Merejkowski, and *The Life of Jesus,* by Ernest Renan—Modern Library, Inc.; *Constantine Samuel Rafinesque,* by David Starr Jordan, *Popular Science Monthly; Reminiscences of John James Audubon,* by Thomas M. Brewer, *Harper's Magazine; The Auk,* the official publication of The American Ornithologists' Union; and, *The Rise of American Civilization,* by Charles A. and Mary Beard, The Macmillan Company—the latter work being especially valuable in studying the historical background of Audubon's life in the Middle West. Also, thanks to Dr. Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer for permission to quote from his *Philadelphia—A History of the City and the People,* and to Walker, Evans & Cogswell for permission to use, in Chapter XXVII, a brief passage from one of Dr. Bachman's letters as published in C. L. Bachman's *John Bachman.*

Among the other books, periodicals and articles consulted but not heretofore mentioned, were: *John James Audubon,* by John Burroughs; *The Life and Adventures of Audubon The Naturalist,* by Robert Buchanan; *Audubon the Original Nature Fakir,* by W. M. Hutt, and *A Defense of Audubon,* by G. W. Colles, in *Scien-*

tific American, 1908; *Key To North American Birds,* by Elliott Coues; *Alexander Wilson,* by Dr. Witmer Stone, in *Leading American Men of Science; Life of Wilson,* by George Ord; *Life and Writings of Rafinesque,* by Richard Ellsworth Call; *Spencer Fullerton Baird,* by William Healey Dall; *Haiti—Her History and Her Detractors,* by J. N. Léger; *French Society of the Eighteenth Century,* by Louis Ducros; *Travels in France,* by Arthur Young; *The French Revolution,* by Thomas Carlisle; *Ninety-Three,* by Victor Hugo; *Fifty Years In Both Hemispheres,* by Vincent Nolte; *Old New York,* by Dr. John W. Francis; *Travels In Some Parts of the United States of America In the Years 1804, '05, '06,* by Robert Sutcliff; *American Social History—as Recorded by British Travellers,* by Allan Nevins; *Hawkers and Walkers,* by Richardson Wright; *The Ohio River,* by Archer Butler Hulbert; *Mississippi Steamboatin',* by Herbert and Edward C. Quick; *The American Adventure,* by David Saville Muzzey; *History of Henderson County, Kentucky,* by Edmund L. Starling; *The History of Louisville,* by Ben Casseday; *New Orleans—The Place and The People,* by Grace King; and the files of *Bird-Lore,* the official publication of The National Association of Audubon Societies.

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E. A. M.